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ABSTRACT

This report for individuals and organizations engaged in literacy outreach activities explores a youth agency-based, social service professional-facilitated strategy for reaching out-of-school youth. Chapter I describes the growing problem of school dropout. Chapter II synthesizes governmental and scholarly studies of youth and schooling, reporting findings on the numbers and identity of early school leavers and their social and economic prospects. Various analyses of dropouts' attitudes toward schooling and reasons for leaving are reviewed. In Chapter III, descriptions of youth life--in alternative educational programs, in the labor force, as heads of households, and on the streets--are offered. Chapter IV reviews literature findings about dropouts' actual skill levels and explores actual functions of literacy in the youth street culture. Chapter V outlines the advocated intervention strategy, which draws on two critical perspectives: the functional approach to literacy training developed by adult educators and based on use of materials of immediate interest and use to the learner and youth service workers' approaches to working with out-of-school youth. Chapter VI is an annotated listing of reports, teaching materials, and other resources for youth literacy program developers. (YLB)

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**A Report for Literacy Volunteers
Working with Out-of-School Youth**

**Nancy Faires Conklin
and
Janise Hurtig**

**Increasing Volunteer Literacy Training
for Out-of-School Youth**

June 1986

Revised Edition

**Literacy and Language Program
Stephen Reder, Director**

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem and Strategy

This report* is offered to individuals and organizations engaged in literacy outreach activities whose client base includes, or might be extended to include, out-of-school youth. It describes the growing problem of school drop out and offers an approach to educational programming which may provide an economically feasible way to reach these expanding numbers of under-educated and unemployable youth. By bringing together the educational and human resources of literacy volunteer organizations and social agencies' expertise in working with and access to alienated young people, much-needed basic skills education may be delivered to a wider spectrum of the out-of-school youth population.

Dropping out of the educational system. The nearly one million 14- to 21-year-olds who drop out of middle and high schools each year present an urgent and difficult challenge to educators:

- o They are outside the institutional reach of the schools.
- o They have functional skills needs unlike those of both in-school youth and adults.
- o They are highly under-educated.

The need to reach these young people is particularly keen. They are just at the beginning of adulthood, facing the prospect of five to six decades of under- and unemployment and a lifetime of marginality in our literacy-based society.

*The authors have drawn freely on the expertise of the entire staff of the Literacy and Language Program throughout the project. Their experience with literacy questions and with manuscript preparation is reflected here. The first author served as lead researcher for the project and prepared this report. The second author was the fieldworker for the project and a contributor to the report. We extend sincere thanks to the agency personnel and youth who cooperated with us, facilitating the research, responding thoughtfully to our questions, and providing many of the insights on which the report is based.

Although many dropouts possess such low literacy skills that they fail to qualify for federally-funded job training, out-of-school youth have demonstrated strong and continuing reluctance to participate in established educational programs. Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Educational Development Certificate (GED) programs have been successful in attracting only a portion of the youthful dropout population, and attrition rates are unacceptably high. In the volunteer sector, literacy tutoring organizations have found youth a particularly challenging population to contact and to work with. Literacy volunteer organizations have expanded their efforts from tutoring non-reading adults to the non-English-speaking adult population, but youth have remained largely outside the scope of their work. Materials as well as methods designed for reaching out-of-school youth are notably lacking.

Social agencies' success with youth. While it has proven extremely difficult to attract out-of-school youth to basic skills training programs, some youth-serving social agencies have been successful in transmitting certain functional communications skills to their clients as part of their counselling and outreach work. Our research among youth-serving agencies has uncovered an array of activities that draw on or expand literacy skills in their clients, for example, autobiographical writing assignments as part of the counselling process for troubled youth and a creative writing contest at a drop-in shelter for street youth.

Youth willingly participating in these activities are often, the agency professionals and dropouts themselves report, at the same time unwilling to return to schooling in any of the guises in which it is currently widely available. Youth-serving agencies thus appear to provide a setting and service context in which training might be delivered, expanded from a basis in activities in which this hard-to-reach population is already functionally engaged.

Unfortunately, the staffs of these centers have neither the time nor the expertise to integrate basic skills training into their work. Here, then, is the opportunity for volunteer literacy tutoring organizations to reach out successfully to young dropouts: Agencies and their personnel offer the connection to out-of-school youth and can share their insight into appropriate ways of working with youth.

This report explores a youth agency-based, social service professional-facilitated strategy for reaching, and teaching, out-of-school youth. It is designed to make the connection between trainers and dropouts through the settings youth frequent, using activities and materials of interest to youth and functional for out-of-school life, mediated by the adults whom they trust. The findings and recommendations are based on a year-long study of scholarly and professional analyses of the scope and causes of school dropout and field investigation of out-of-school youth and youth services.

A Field Study of Out-of-School Youth

The study site is a major metropolitan area which serves as the hub for its state's economy and culture. The state assesses its dropout rate through a count of the number of students who leave school in grades nine through 12 and fail to return. This "early school leaver" rate averaged 26.6% for the period 1978-84 (Department of Education Memo, 1984). As elsewhere in the country, rural and urban districts exhibit higher attrition rates than suburban and small town schools.

The youth population. The city's downtown section is a magnet for youth, attracting both in-school youth and dropouts from the entire metropolitan area to its recreational facilities, public squares, and commercial establishments such as stores, coffee shops, movie houses, video arcades, and under-age night clubs. Youth are highly visible on the downtown streets, hanging out in groups stratified by ethnicity, personal identification as articulated in style of dress and details of behavior, and, often, in- vs. out-of-school status. Most of these are "weekend warriors" -- youth who live at home but frequent the streets, after or sometimes during school hours. Younger kids emulate the posturings and habits of older, often out-of-school models. Weekend warriors may be occasional or habitual truants; many are students regarded by their schools as "at risk" of dropping out. Many have already dropped out, but are living at home, perhaps working part-time, but identifying with the street culture, not the work world.

The city is also "home" to a sizable, but unknown number of runaway youth. Estimates of the number of "street kids" -- the youthful homeless -- range from lows of 300 to 500 (as reported by the city police) to several thousand (as calculated by social agency personnel in regular contact with the population). Most of these street kids are from the metropolitan area, though the city attracts rural and small town youth from throughout the state and is also more widely known as a street culture center and visited by homeless youth from the entire region. Juvenile prostitution is regarded as a serious, growing problem by city officials, social workers, and the general public; observers state that over half the street kids -- male and female -- are sexually exploited by adults.

The study population. The project fieldwork included participant-observation at youth hang-outs in public and commercial spaces in the central city and several urban and suburban neighborhoods and observation and interviews of youth and staff in three youth-serving social agencies, as well as visits to and interviews with professionals in a variety of city and county agencies directly providing youth services. Writing samples were collected whenever available.

Youth in a wide variety of situations were included in the study. Those directly observed during this study are a non-representative and small, but broad sample of the street-oriented youth population. They include youth out of both school and their homes, dropouts living at home, and truants and dropouts in the process of returning to school and to their own or public homes. We spoke with close to 100 youth over the course of

three months, some first time runaways, others who had been living on the streets and supporting themselves (mainly through illegitimate means) for years, and still others who were moving off the streets, studying for their GED, and/or looking for legitimate employment.

Out-of-school youth who are regularly employed, who are at home (perhaps with an infant to care for), who do not frequent the street culture, and those enrolled in a conventional educational program are excluded from this sample. Incarcerated juveniles -- most of whom compulsorily attend educational programs -- also fall outside the scope of the study.

In addition to observation and casual interaction, we conducted structured interviews with 23 youth at three social agency field sites. These youth, 14 females and 9 males, ranged in age from 13 to their early 20s. The earliest to drop out in the group left during grade six. Most were interviewed at the field site most embedded in the street culture, a drop-in center offering food and clothing to homeless youth. Two of the interviewees were enrolled in an alternative, individualized GED-preparation program at the time of interview; one was enrolled part-time in a high school program as she made the transition from street life to life in a publicly-funded group home. Four of the interviewees had taken some form of GED preparation. Six reported that they had had experience with pre-employment or vocational training since leaving school; five told us that they had failed to qualify for such programs.

The majority of the interviewees reported negative past schooling experiences: Twelve recalled school as "good", six as "bad" for them. Eight of 22 expressed plans to return to school; five had or planned to obtain a GED; five were determined to stay out of school entirely.

The interview sample appears to be fairly representative of the larger number of youth whom we met and who were described to us by agency staff. However, they probably have some interest in the subject of this study, since they were willing to participate in the interview. They may also have stronger literacy skills than is typical of street youth in general. The study was intended to explore in some depth the literacy skills, experiences, and environment of a selected group of youth. Readers are reminded that the number of interviewees was small and the study was not designed to enable us to generalize its findings to street youth as a whole.

Field sites. At three primary study sites the fieldworker functioned in a volunteer capacity, talking informally with clients and helping them with various activities, and conducting structured interviews with a total of 23 youth about their literacy practices and educational background, attitudes, and aspirations. The three agencies* represent different points on the spectrum of youth services and client populations.

Your House is a non-profit, publicly- and charitably-funded center offering a 24-hour crisis line, counselling, and short-term emergency shelter to runaways aged 10 to 18.

*Names of sites, personnel, and youth are pseudonymous throughout.

Working with the county juvenile court and with families, it serves runaways who are considering or are in the process of transition back to their families or into permanent group homes and, sometimes, back to school. Clients come predominantly from lower and lower-middle class backgrounds, though one attended in a sports car purchased for her by her family. Youth come to the agency through referral from the court, at the behest their families (sometimes suggested by a school counsellor), and by self-referral. Most Your House clients return to their family homes, after individual and family counselling and conflict negotiation by the agency staff. Some of these kids are in school. Those who are not -- the majority -- are brought from assigned housing or their homes to spend the day at the agency, where they pass their time in the lounge, entertaining themselves between counselling appointments with television and a few other limited amusements. Clients at Your House typically have a record of habitual truancy prior to running away and most were or are performing well below grade level in school.

The Way In is a drop-in center for street youth located in a commercial building in the city center, on a block abutting a primary district for juvenile prostitution. It is funded privately by religious and civic organizations and nightly provides free meals, clothing, and a warm room to hang out for a few hours to 70 to 100 under-21-year-olds. Individual and group counselling is also available and staff try to meet the continuing demand for assistance with legal, health, and welfare problems. Youth frequenting The Way In can be served anonymously and are under no obligation to participate in counselling, nor do the staff advocate return to school or home, unless a counselling relation is voluntarily entered into by the youth. The client population is transient; staff estimate they see 85 new youths per month. These are mostly the youthful homeless, street kids. According to an in-house survey, The Way In clients are two-thirds male, roughly proportional to the street kid population, mostly in the 17- to 20-year age range, but as young as 11, and correspond in ethnic distribution to the population of the metropolitan area, with the exception of overrepresentation of American Indians.

The Study Center provides GED preparation, job placement assistance, and pre-employment training to youth from throughout the city. Part of a non-profit multi-service neighborhood assistance agency, it is an individualized alternative for 15- to 25-year-old dropouts who will not attend or cannot succeed in standard GED and employment training courses offered by the public schools, Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programs, and agencies such as the Private Industry Council (PIC). Some of these are youth whose skills are too low to qualify them for federally-funded job training; for others the common 10-week GED courses go too swiftly for their skills or their ability to

attend regularly. Street kids, especially, lead unpredictable lives, never knowing where they will be spending a night or how their next day's schedule will be structured; The Study Center is virtually the only educational option for them. The Study Center's clientele may be walk-ins, referrals from public agencies, or referrals from other GED programs in which they have not succeeded. Most are in the 17- to 19-year-old range. Some -- and they are the most successful in the program -- are living at home and receiving some financial and social support from family; others live in group homes or in the streets. Dropouts otherwise unwilling to attend academic and job skills courses have been attracted to The Study Center by its academic and vocational program's flexible structure and the close tie that the agency has forged with local employers who bring what the youth see as "real world" information and, sometimes, provide jobs to successful students.

Two of the three sites are non-educational agencies, offering illustrations of the variety of youth social services; the third has developed educational services attractive to a broad range out-of-school youth. Your House and The Way In both represent potential literacy tutoring sites, although they differ widely in approach, intent, and clientele. Your House treats kids on the margins of the street culture. They are school truants, often, but some are in school; others have GED plans or are seeking regular employment. They are making the decision to return home or seek alternative, adult-supervised living situations and are in intensive counselling. The Way In, by contrast, primarily serves kids who are far more involved -- or enmeshed -- in the street culture, homeless and, in many cases, participating in prostitution or other illegal activities such as drug dealing. The agency assists them with survival on the streets, providing necessities of food and clothing, but without any commitment on the youths' part to accept further help or abandon street life. This report will explore ways in which basic skills training might be integrated into these and still other youth-serving settings.

The third site, The Study Center, unlike most traditionally structured educational programs, has successfully attracted youth from the full range of youth-serving agencies -- and directly from the streets -- to its basic skill and employment-orientation courses. Its successful approaches may provide guidelines for out-of-school youth literacy program development.

A Report of Findings and Recommendations

In developing outreach programs that can attract and retain out-of-school youth, literacy and basic skills program planners and developers, tutor trainers, and volunteers will be aided by this report's synthesis of current research on youth and the dropout problem and its investigation

of dropouts' literacy practices and skill levels. The specific strategy of integrating literacy service into the offerings of youth-serving social agencies is outlined in detail for educational developers to adopt or adapt as they extend their program outreach to out-of-school youth.

Chapter II, "Early School Leaving: A Growing Practice", brings together governmental and scholarly studies of youth and schooling, reporting critical findings on the numbers and identity of early school leavers and their social and economic prospects. Various analyses of dropouts' attitudes toward schooling and reasons for leaving are also reviewed. These data will illustrate that the decision to leave school is, for most, neither hasty nor capricious, but rather the outcome of years of distancing from the world of the school and, in the eyes of the youth, a more viable choice than school completion.

In Chapter III, "Life Out of School", descriptions of youth life, in alternative educational programs, in the labor force, as heads of their own households, and on the streets are offered from this and other studies. It is important that educational planners have some insight into the milieu from which many dropouts (and in-school, but at-risk youth) draw their beliefs, concerns, and interests.

"Out-of-School Youths' Literacy Skills and Practices" follows as Chapter IV. The section first reviews what can be pieced together from the literature about dropouts' actual skill levels. This information, even if it were more complete, would not provide sufficient insight to form the basis of an outreach program. The intervention strategy proposed in this report depends upon an understanding of the functions for literacy in the youth community, thus actual functions of literacy in the youth street culture are explored. Because of the limitations of much of the inquiry into youths' actual literacy practices, the findings in this section are based primarily on the observations and interviews conducted for this study. Samples of youth writing are included as illustrations.

Chapter V, "Integrating Literacy Skills Training into Out-of-School Youth Services", outlines the intervention strategy advocated here. This strategy draws on two critical perspectives: 1) the functional approach to literacy training developed by adult educators and based on use of materials of immediate interest and utility to the learner and 2) youth service workers' approaches to working with the out-of-school youth population. Successful basic skills programs for dropouts are described and implications drawn for volunteer literacy organizations' efforts. The chapter also briefly surveys the types of youth services typically available in urban and suburban communities and assesses their appropriateness as literacy program sites.

The concluding section, Chapter VI, "Resources for Literacy Program Developers", is an annotated listing of reports, teaching and training materials, and other resources which may be of assistance to literacy organizations as they begin to plan programs and train tutors for work with out-of-school youth.

CHAPTER II

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING: A GROWING PRACTICE

Perhaps one million American youth drop out (or, as some argue, are pushed out) of school each year, 700,000 leaving school early and an additional 300,000 acting as such chronic truants that they cannot be said to be engaged in education in any meaningful sense (Sherraden 1985). Observers who assume all these school leavers lack the basic skills argue that they compose about half the annual number of new functional illiterates, believed to be growing at the rate of 2.3 million yearly (Delker 1984). While the educational skills levels of out-of-school youth remain to be determined (see Chapter III, below), youths' alienation from the worlds of school and work is a clear cause for grave concern.

Not only educators, but leaders in all sectors of society -- employers and political and social observers prime among them -- have begun to recognize the long-term negative effects that an uneducated youth portends for the United States. Business foresees a shortage of acceptable entry-level employees as the number of 14- to 24-year-olds declines simultaneous with the rise in dropout rates (Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Commission 1985). Political and social leaders point to the 58% proportion of dropouts in the prison population (Gold 1984) and rapidly rising rates of teen crimes, suicides, unemployment, and pregnancy concomitant with the increasing disconnection of youth from the schools (Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Commission 1985).

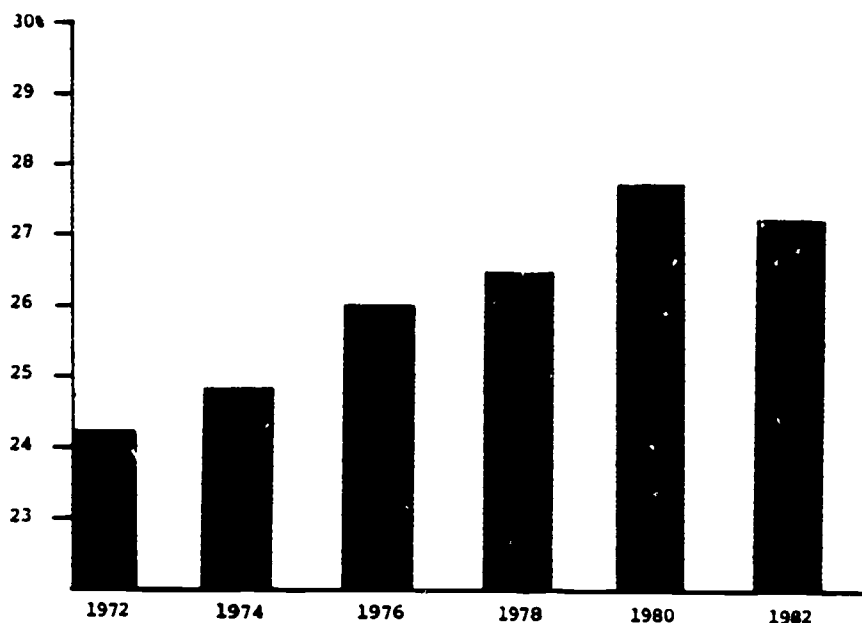
This chapter reviews the statistics on who drops out of school and explores, insofar as they are known, the reasons so many youth do not complete high school. The critical question here is why increasing numbers of average and superior scholars, as well as many marginal and failing students, come to choose the world of work or the world of the streets over pursuit of a high school diploma. As the sections below will outline, dropout unemployment is high and the streets are a very mean place to be, yet, for one in four American youth, the risks are worth it. In order to create compensatory educational programs that will successfully attract and retain out-of-school youth it will be necessary to gain a clear understanding of the rationales according to which these youth decided to abandon education in the first place.

Rates of School Dropout

While figures on the numbers of dropouts vary somewhat according to the ways school leaving is recorded*, state, federal, and privately-assembled statistics all report that an increasing proportion of young Americans are quitting school without a diploma. Figure One traces the increase in numbers of nongraduates from 1972 to 1982, followed by an apparent leveling off in the current decade. Educators predict, however, that the percentage of dropouts will rise again as the full effects of this decade's "school improvement" reforms are felt. These reforms have raised academic standards and, equally important to many marginal students' decisions, have narrowed program choices (Council of Great City Schools 1985).

FIGURE ONE

Percent of 18-Year-Olds Not Graduating, 1972-82



Source: Education Commission of the States
Business Advisory Commission 1985:16

*Some reports cite failure to graduate on time, using school censuses of individual students and the aggregate numbers in the student body, while other reports offer dropout numbers derived from a combination of indicators.

One in four. The national average rate of high school noncompletion is widely reported as 26%, that is, in the 1980s over one-fourth of all youth fail to graduate with their class. State departments of education report noncompletion rates that vary from a low of 5% (North Dakota) up to 43% (Louisiana) (Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Council 1985:16). Schools in our largest cities experience very high rates of dropout, for example, in 1984 40% of students in New York City failed to graduate, in Chicago 49%, in Los Angeles 55%, and in Miami 60% (Dropouts: Shocking Enough to Get Our Attention? 1985:1). Like large urban districts, small rural districts have a disproportionately high dropout rate (Beck and Muia 1980:65).

The state in which this study was conducted has a dropout rate of 27%, according to the Education Commission for the States (1985), just above the national average. A state Department of Education study (1984) found that student attrition between ninth grade and graduation rose from 26.6% in 1978 to 29.5% in 1984. This study reports that attrition is highest between the beginning of the twelfth grade and graduation and that this rate is continuing to rise, while second-greatest attrition is between eleventh and twelfth and that this rate has stabilized in recent years.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has conducted a long-term study of school leavers. Since 1980 its researchers have followed a sample of 60,000 then-sophomores as they progressed through and out of school (Peng 1983)*. Table One reports the results of this study for 1983, the year the 1980 sophomores should have graduated. Percentages of dropouts in the NCES study are somewhat smaller than the state noncompletion rates cited in the paragraphs above since 1) NCES tracking locates students who have fallen behind their class but are still enrolled in an educational program and 2) the NCES study does not reflect students who dropped out before the sophomore year sample was constructed, while state education departments' numbers are cumulative.

Sex, region, and community type. Overall, boys are somewhat less likely to receive their diplomas than are girls (14.7% vs. 12.6%). However, these are not across-the-board differences. Dropout rates are higher in the West and the South than in the Northeast and North Central regions of the country (16.6% and 15.2% vs. 11.3% and 12.0%, respectively). In the Northeast there is a decided difference between male and female noncompletion rates (13.4% vs. 9.0%), a somewhat lesser, but still notable difference in the South (16.4% vs. 14.0%), and little sex difference in dropout rate elsewhere.

*A subset of the dropouts in the NCES sample were interviewed about their reasons for leaving school and their out-of-school success. These results are reviewed later in this chapter. It is important to note that this major national study reached out-of-school youth through contacts with their family homes. Thus many of the youth with whom we are most concerned here, i.e., those living out of connection with their families, are not included in the national sample.

TABLE ONE

Percent of 1980 Sophomores Who Left High School
Before Graduation, by Sex and Selected Background Variables

<u>Background Variable</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
All Students	14.7	12.6	13.6
Geographic Region			
Northeast	13.4	9.0	11.3
North Central	12.2	11.7	12.0
South	16.4	14.0	15.2
West	17.0	16.3	16.6
Community Type			
Urban	20.8	17.0	18.9
Suburban	12.5	11.0	11.8
Rural	13.6	12.0	12.8
High School Program			
Academic	4.5	3.6	4.0
General	12.7	13.0	12.9
Vocational/technical	16.9	13.2	15.1
Self-reported Grade			
Mostly As	2.0	3.5	2.9
Mostly Bs	7.8	8.4	8.1
Mostly Cs	18.1	19.1	18.5
Mostly Ds	41.7	44.1	42.5
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian/ Alaska Native	27.2	31.8	29.2
Hispanic	18.1	18.0	18.0
Black	20.3	14.1	17.0
White	13.0	11.5	12.2
Asian	3.5	2.7	3.1
Socioeconomic Status*			
High	7.0	3.2	5.2
Midale	9.6	8.3	9.0
Low	17.8	17.1	17.4
Unknown	32.3	30.9	31.6

*Socioeconomic status is derived from a composite of variables:
father's and mother's education, father's occupation, family
income and household items available.

Source: Peng 1983:3

Urban schools experience the highest rates of school noncompletion (18.9%); more urban boys than girls drop out (20.8% vs. 17.0%). The lower, 12.8% figure for rural schools masks a high degree of variability: On the one hand, some rural districts, especially in poorer agricultural areas, experience noncompletion rates higher than those in urban districts, while, on the other hand, the predominantly rural states in the Upper Midwest and Great Plains have the lowest dropout rates in the nation. The West's highest regional dropout rate reflects high levels of noncompletion in many rural districts.

School program and academic success. Enrollment in a non-academic program is, for significant numbers of students, a step toward dropping out; both vocational/technical and general programs have far higher rates of dropout than the academic track (15.1% and 12.9% vs. 4.0%, respectively). Highest dropout rates are for boys in vocational/-technical programs (16.9%). These students' decisions reflect the labor market: Vocational/technical program students are the most readily employable dropouts and those who command the highest wages (Fine and Rosenberg 1983). Tracking itself -- separate from achievement or ability of students in the different curriculum tracks -- may contribute significantly to school leaving. Some observers argue that enrollment in a low track leads students to perceive themselves as socially ineligible for educational achievement (Papagiannis, Bickel and Fuller 1983).

Academic failure is a strong motivator to leave school. Fully 50% of dropouts are older than their classmates (Dropouts: Shocking Enough to Get Our Attention? 1985:3). Students' self-reports to the NCES survey support this generalization. Well over a third, but less than half (42.5%) of the dropouts responding reported that they were receiving mostly Ds at the time they left school. However, 18.5% were C students, i.e., average academic achievers. Over 10% reported that they were doing well in school, at or near honor roll standing (8.1% reporting mostly Bs and 2.9% mostly As).

An evaluative study of dropouts found that perhaps 50 to 75% of school leavers had the ability to complete high school, though standardized test scores and school records did not always reflect this ability (Weidman and Friedmann 1984:32). Beck and Muia (1980) similarly report that the majority of dropouts are in the average intellectual range and that 11% of school leavers have the intellectual ability to succeed in college. The motivations leading the significant numbers of adequate and strong students and failing, but high- or average-ability students to leave school are discussed below.

Ethnicity. The high school years are the period in which children leave school. While 90% of American children enter high school, 30% of them fail to graduate (Weber and Silvani-Lacey 1983). However, most educators believe that important factors leading students to drop out in their later teens are already in place far earlier in children's lives. As Table One indicates, ethnicity and family socioeconomic status strongly influence likelihood of school completion.

White dropout rates were recorded in the NCES study at 12.2%. Asians had the lowest dropout rates by far (3.1%). There is, however, great

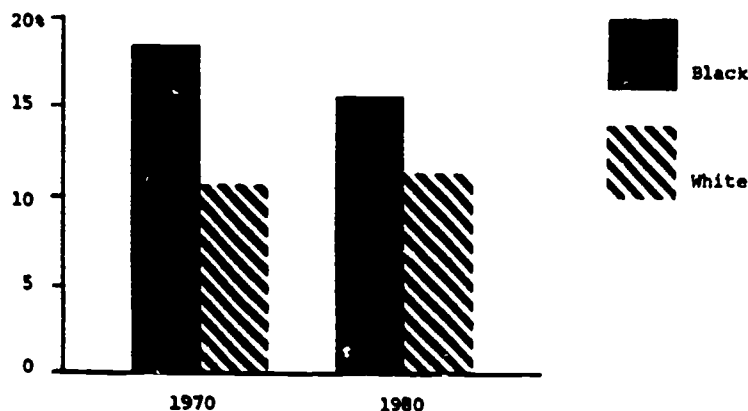
variation among ethnicities grouped as Asian. Pacific Islanders have high rates of noncompletion; only 65.7% of Samoan Americans, for example, succeed in completing high school (Literacy and Language Program 1984:47). Almost one-third of American Indians and Alaska Natives fail to complete high school with their class (29.2%). Nearly one in five Hispanic and black youths fails to complete school (18.0% and 17.0%, respectively). Among Blacks, significantly more boys drop out than girls (20.3% vs. 14.1%). Other studies have found higher rates, especially for Hispanics: Sherraden (1985) reports black dropout at just 15% but Hispanic school-leaving at 23%. Fine and Rosenberg (1983:158) found 20% of Blacks and 33% of Hispanics failing to complete high school.

Among Hispanics, family language background is a significant factor affecting school completion. In a 1982 study of minority dropouts, 33% of Hispanics failed to complete high school. However, when language of the home was taken into account, ethnic Hispanics from English-speaking homes were found to have rates of noncompletion comparable to the U.S. average. Those from non-English-speaking homes dropped out at twice the average national rate (reported in Fine and Rosenberg 1983:158).

While dropout rates for black youth far exceed those for white students, the past decade has witnessed a trend toward convergence of black and white school leaving. Figure Two records this trend. U.S. Census figures, also using a conservative measure of dropping out, found the percentage of whites leaving school rose almost 1% from the 1970 to the 1980 Census. Blacks, however, exhibited a 3% decrease in rate of dropout over the same period. The difference in rate by ethnicity fell from 8% to just over 4% in the 10-year period.

FIGURE TWO

Percent of Early School Leavers,
by Race, 1970 and 1980



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce 1984

Socioeconomic status. Generally, children of blue collar families are more likely to drop out than white collar children (Beck and Muia 1980:66). Family background is a strong predictor of school completion. Low educational attainment of the father correlates with sons' dropping out; low educational attainment of the mother correlates with daughters' dropping out (Rumberger 1983).

Low socioeconomic status correlates strongly with school dropout. According to the NCES study reported in Table One, youth categorized in the high socioeconomic group had a 5.2% dropout rate, 9.0% of those in the socioeconomic midrange dropped out, while 17.4% of low socioeconomic status youth left school.

Indeed, socioeconomic status overrides many other indicators in predicting likelihood of school noncompletion. For example, when white students of families with incomes of less than \$10,000 are compared to children in black families with incomes over \$10,000, the poor whites are twice as likely to drop out of school (Sherraden 1985).

Using family income as a measure of socioeconomic status, a study of 16- to 24-year-olds found that two-thirds of dropouts, both black and white, came from families below the median income (Weidman and Friedmann 1984). Table Two, detailing data from that study, shows that income is a particularly strong indicator for black girls' dropout. Education of parents, also an indicator of socioeconomic status, proved predictive as well. Lack of a high school diploma by the head of household correlated strongly with children's dropout: 61% of white dropouts and 77% of black dropouts came from homes in which the head of household had not completed school.

TABLE TWO

Percent of Early School Leavers Among 16- to 24-Year-Olds,
by Race, Income, and Education of Head of Household, 1979

	Overall Dropout Rate*	Dropouts Below Median Income		Dropouts in Households Headed by Nongraduates*
		Male	Female	
Black	21	60	77	77
White	14	66	68	61

*Sex not a significant variable

Source: Reported in Weidman and Friedmann 1984:26

Socioeconomic factors appear to be increasing in their importance in the decision to leave school. According to 1985 NCES data, the lowest third of children socioeconomically are three to four times more likely to drop out of school than are children of middle and upper income families. Significant numbers of youth from middle class homes are, however, out of school and among the participants in street life. Many of these youth have repudiated the ambitions and values of their families and may share the perspective that education is not important that is thought to be more representative of children of non-educated parents.

The Decision to Leave

Dropping out of school appears to result from boys' and girls' disengagement from the educational process and orientation away from the school as a central institution in their lives. Thus, families with limited direct experience with education raise children who are likely to leave school early. Lower income families, whose primary preoccupation must be securing a minimal income, may come to look on education as secondary to their older children's immediate wage-earning potential. And those families cannot, as do middle- and upper-income families, provide their children with the disposable income now essential for full participation in the youth culture consumption of entertainment, stylish clothing, and fast food. Youth who desire these things must find a way to secure money themselves.

Thus, youth from lower socioeconomic strata have multiple motivations for leaving school. For example, the very high dropout rates among American Indians and Alaska Natives can be seen as resulting from the combination of limited familial experience with education, extremely low income, and, for many, participation in a traditional cultural setting in which education beyond the basic skills does not play a necessary role in daily life.

School failure only one cause. The NCES national study of dropouts found that, while academic failure and dislike of school were the most frequently cited reasons for leaving school, employment (especially for boys) and family matters (especially for girls) were also significant factors in the decision to leave school (see Table Three). Over a third of boys (35.9%) and over a fourth (29.7%) of girls report that they had poor grades - a substantial, but still surprisingly small proportion of the sample. Thirteen percent of the boys and only 5.3% of the girls had been dismissed. Thus, most of the dropouts would be considered voluntary.

About a third of both the girls and boys responded that "school was not for me", indicating withdrawal from orientation to school. Only relatively few girls (9.5%) had trouble getting along with school staff, however 20.6% of the boys report that they had interpersonal difficulties with teachers. Generally, more boys' decisions are based on dislike and inability to get along in school.

TABLE THREE

Percent Distribution of Reason for Leaving School
Reported by 1980 Sophomores Who Left High School
Before Graduation, by Sex

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
School-Related		
Expelled or suspended	13.0	5.3
Had poor grades	35.9	29.7
School was not for me	34.8	31.1
School ground was too dangerous	2.7	1.7
Didn't get into desired program	7.5	4.5
Couldn't get along with teachers	20.6	9.5
Family-Related		
Married or planned to get married	6.9	30.7
Was pregnant	N/A	23.4
Had to support family	13.6	8.3
Peer-Related		
Friends were dropping out	6.5	2.4
Couldn't get along with students	5.4	5.9
Health-Related		
Illness or disability	4.6	6.5
Employment		
Offered job and chose to work	26.9	10.7
Other		
Wanted to enter military	7.2	.8
Moved too far from school	2.2	5.3
Wanted to travel	7.0	6.5

n = 1,188 males; 1,101 females

More than one reason may be given, therefore figures do not sum to 100%.

Source: Peng 1983:5

The state in which the present study was conducted undertook a detailed examination of early school leavers (Department of Education 1980). Over 500 dropouts from grades nine through twelve were telephone-interviewed.* Of the sample, 87.1% were still out of school, but 9.7% were enrolled in GED programs. Table Four lists some of the findings in response to a query about their reasons for leaving school. Most offered multiple responses, leading the surveyors to conclude that "the most dramatic finding in the study was that reasons for leaving school are varied and complex" (p.14). While two-thirds (65.5%) of the reasons cited for leaving school were school-related, only a minority (15.9%) related to

*Like the NCES study, this state survey sampled only those dropouts who were accessible through their families. Thus it, too, omits from consideration youth who have severed ties with their homes.

academic failure (including: failing grades, lack of credits, difficulty, basic skills and competencies, incomplete classwork and school disciplinary actions).

TABLE FOUR

Self-Report of Reasons for Leaving School
in the Study State, 1980

	Percent Distribution of Reasons Cited	Proportion of Sample Citing This Reason
School-Related	65.5	
Academic (24.0)		42.1
Failing grades (1.9)		
Lack credits (0.2)		
Basic skills (0.2)		
Competencies (0.2)		
Incomplete classwork (1.9)		
Difficulty (1.9)		
Conduct standards (14.2)		25.8
Nonattendance (6.6)		
Disciplinary action (4.0)		
Interpersonal relations (10.7)		18.6
School personnel (16.6)		31.6
Advised to leave/not encouraged to stay (3.3)		
Self/Personal	16.1	34.8
Bored/not like school (7.0)		
Physical illness (2.5)		
Family/Home	7.3	15.0
Pregnant (2.3)		
Marriage (1.0)		
Parents not support staying (1.1)		
Financial need (1.0)		
Work/Alternative Education (9.7)	21.6	
Have a job (0.4)		
Plan to work (3.3)		
Alternative education (5.8)		

Note: Since respondents could offer more than one reason, columns do not add to 100%.

Source: Department of Education 1980:13-15

Indeed, less than half (42.0%) of the state study respondents cited any academic reason among the causes for their leaving school. Conduct standards, including compulsory attendance, school regulations, disciplinary actions and other requirements were mentioned by 25.8% of the dropouts. Other school related-reasons were also significant, but, again, not cited by a majority: 18.6% mentioned some problem with interpersonal relations at school (e.g., cliques, feeling out of place) and 31.6% had had problems with school personnel.

Going to work. Over a quarter of the boys in the NCES study (see Table Three, above) reported that they had jobs (26.9%). An additional 7.2% planned to enter the military. Among girls, 10.7% left school for employment. In the study state (see Table Four), a very few of the dropouts (0.4%) had employment waiting when they left school, and only a small number cited employment plans as a reason for leaving (3.3%). The following chapter will return to these figures to examine dropouts' success in the job market.

Family problems. For girls, marriage and pregnancy are leading motivations for leaving school, according to the national survey (see Table Three, above). Almost a quarter of female dropouts in the NCES study (23.4%) were pregnant at the time they left school.

The state figures in Table Four indicate that 7.3% of dropouts cited home and family problems among their reasons for leaving school, and just 2.3% of the girls' responses included pregnancy as a reason for dropping out. Overall, just 15.0% of the respondents to the state study mentioned any family or home reasons for leaving school. It is possible that some of the issues interpreted as "self" or "personal" may also be construed as family-related, since they have to do with emotional state, support for attending school, and financial need, as well as personal attitude and motivation. These self-attributions were mentioned by 34.8% of the school leavers surveyed.

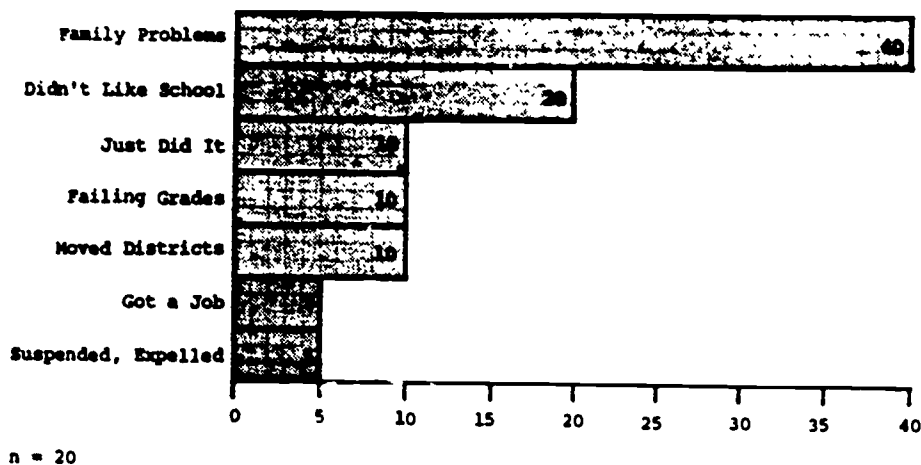
Figure Three provides a picture of the reasons for leaving school that contrasts with the national survey (Table Three) and the state telephone survey (Table Four). It reports the results of the same query posed in personal interview with youth frequenting the social service agencies for street youth that were the sites for this field study. Although the sample is very small (20) and not randomly selected, the responses displayed in Figure Three come from the youth who were excluded in the larger surveys conducted through outreach to families of youth out of school. Asked their main reason for leaving school, these street youth responded with a 15% rate of failure and expulsion. An additional 20% report that they left because they didn't like school; these may or may not have been failing.

But, most significantly, the street youth report a radically different rate of response for family problems as a cause of school leaving. Fully 40% left school because of family difficulties. These included running away from physical and/or sexual abuse at home, an unwanted pregnancy, expulsion from the home, divorce and subsequent shifting back and forth between (apparently unwilling) parents. Additionally, 10% of the youth reported that they left school because their families moved from their district and they did not want to attend a new school and enter an unknown social environment. Many of these moves were also the result of family breakup or shift of child custody from one parent to the other.

For many young people, youth service workers interviewed for this study reported, leaving school was a secondary effect of leaving home. The small sample in Figure Three represents a very few of the large numbers of youth who are away from home. Approximately one million American children and youth run away from home each year (Elkind 1984:194), many

FIGURE THREE

Percent Distribution of Street Youths' Reasons
for Leaving School



of them fleeing abusive family situations. Reported cases of child abuse and neglect, widely believed to constitute only a small minority of the actual occurrences, numbered 924,100 in 1982. The number of cases continues to rise.

Youth-serving agencies find that many adolescents have left home and school because of parents' drinking or drug use and (often concomitant) physical, sexual, or psychological abuse or neglect. One counsellor at Your House, for example, stated:

[What I see here] has to do with how parents interact with kids. I see mostly lack of motivation, which has to do with their general situation at home, which gets reflected in school. But it starts with the messages kids get at home and how they bring them into school. If kids are having problems with authority, if parents have never demanded that of them, it will affect how they go to school and are able to hang in there and do their work. . . . Kids are an open book and families do all the writing in them.

A second counsellor characterized the relation between family problems and dropout thusly:

In situations where family dynamics are problematic, school can become an issue in power dynamics. Attending school becomes a demand of the parents, not a concern. . . . Kids reject school as a form of rebellion. Kids will say, "Watch me!"

These experienced observers suggest that school success and attendance is the only area in which children can exercise control over their lives.

Some make the conscious or unconscious choice to fail in school as an act of resistance, a powerful form of rebellion against their parents. The more parents demand success in school, the more powerful they make the child's refusal. Further, youth counsellors find that school failure and withdrawal is, for many youth, a form of rebellion socially sanctioned by their peer group. Many youth say they left school or ran away from home because their friends did.

Youth are often reluctant to acknowledge the depth of their distress over home and family matters. It is very important to them that they appear "together" and "in charge" among their friends. Yet, they frequently let shocking facts of their internal turmoil fall in casual conversation, passing over them as though they were of little importance, commonplace, and something that "everyone" deals with. For example, one girl, in casual interaction with the fieldworker about an unrelated topic, jokingly related the following:

Oh, my mom's got another boyfriend. But I know it won't last [laughs]. I'm here [Your House] because my big brother tried to get me in trouble [attacked her sexually] -- he always does -- so I just went after him with a big old kitchen knife. [laughs]

A 13-year-old from a well-to-do family, a frequent runaway, related that she and her sister had often been sent off on air trips because

My mom and her boyfriend like to get rid of us so they can be alone sometimes.

The girl shrugged to indicate it "didn't matter", quickly changing the topic.

Figures Four, Five, and Six are reprinted from counselling files at Your House. They are three clients' representations of their lives to date and graphically illustrate the depth of negativity and self-doubt that are the fundamental conditions of these youths' lives. Each of these youth has come to the center for its services as a half-way house between the streets and return to school and home or public group housing. All three youth see their lives in a state of decline. Figures Four and Five, the "Life roads" of a 14-year-old who is in the process of returning to school and a 16-year-old runaway now attending school, are defined by negative emotions including hate, sadness, worry and fear. In Figure Six, a 15-year-old attending school and living in a county group home details the turning points in her life. The critical event was "I become an incest victim." Alcohol and drug use, disputes with her parents, and flight to the streets followed.

Youth service workers report that probably 90 to 95% of street youth come from homes in which they experienced abuse or neglect. Almost all of the nation's 600,000 juvenile prostitutes were subjected to sexual violence by family members. For these young people, life on the streets, regardless of its dangers, is more attractive than the home/school situation in which they have been living.

FIGURE FOUR

A 14-Year-Old's Life Road

Best I can do

THIRD SEMESTER ASSIGNMENT #2

LIFE ROAD

Use the space below to draw a "road" that represents the happenings in your life that affected you. Use your imagination to show the "high" and "low" and what events actually occurred. There's no right or wrong way to do this - it's your life!

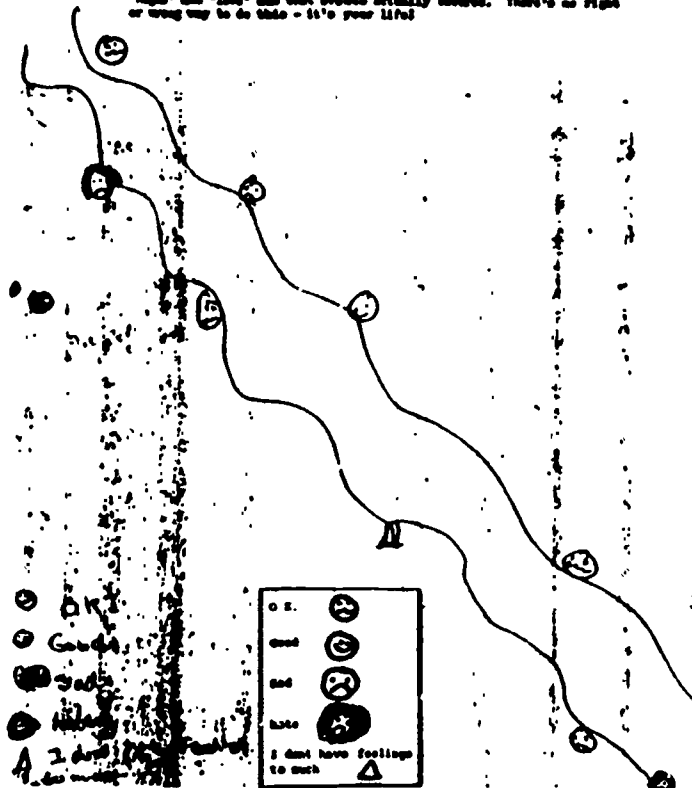


FIGURE FIVE

A 16-Year-Old's Life Road

THIRD SEMESTER ASSIGNMENT #2

LIFE ROAD

Use the space below to draw a "road" that represents the happenings in your life that affected you. Use your imagination to show the "high" and "low" and what events actually occurred. There's no right or wrong way to do this - it's your life!

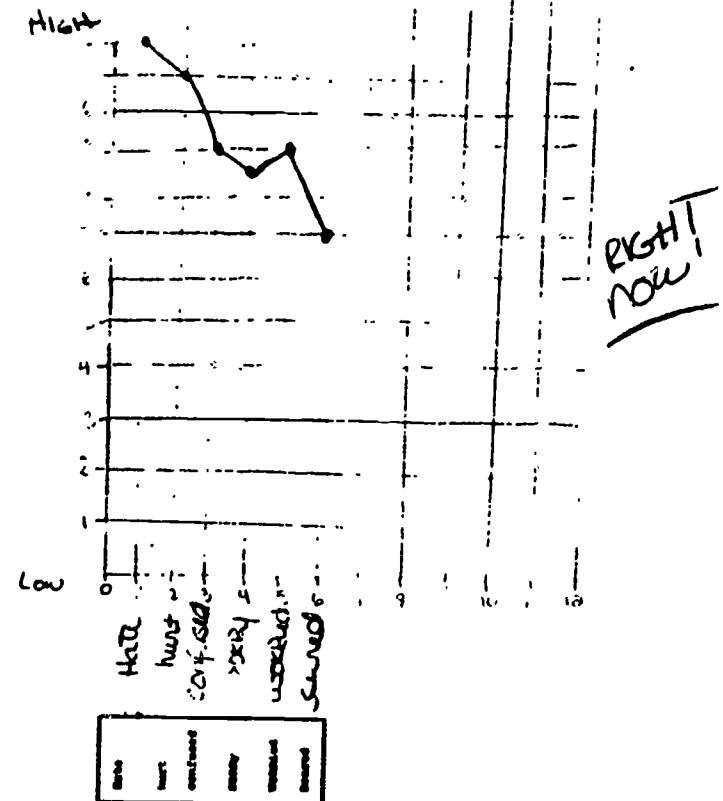
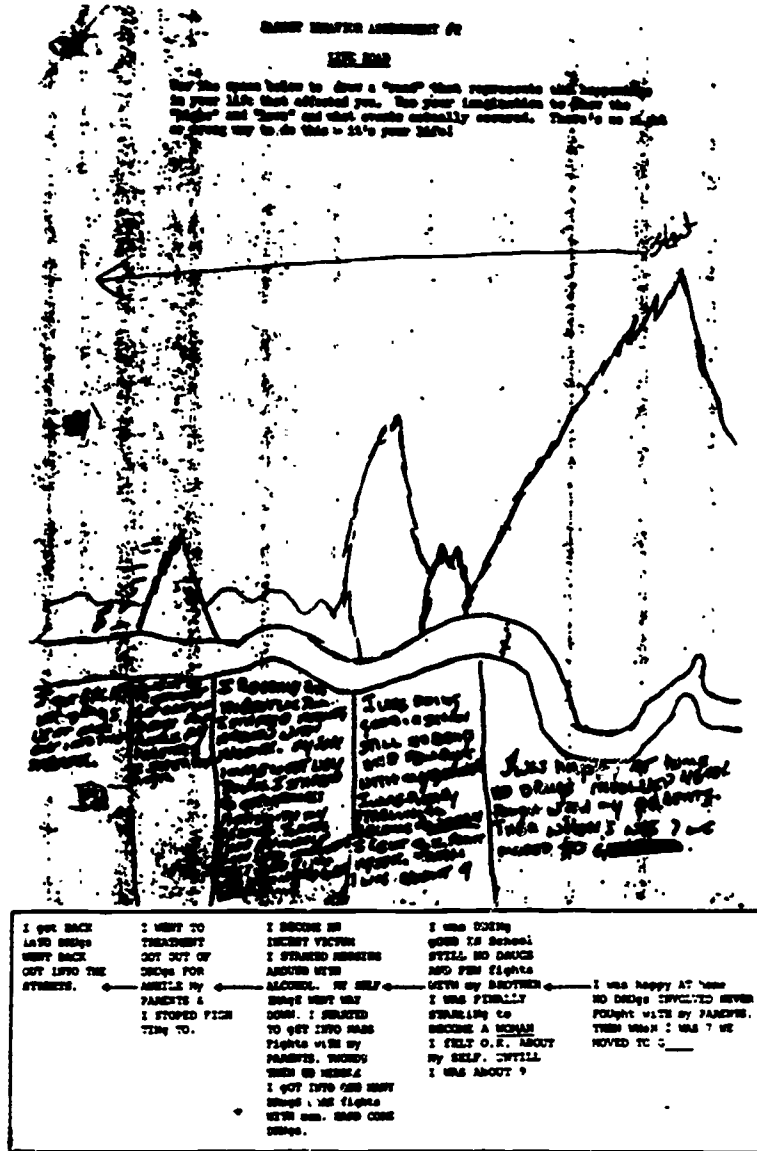


FIGURE SIX

A 15-Year-Old's Life Road



While their severe personal problems may have interfered with their school work, these are by and large academically capable youth who could, if they were brought into a supportive living situation, complete their educations successfully.

Disengagement Leads to Dropout

Not a rash decision. Most observers find that the decision to leave school evolves gradually, as young people withdraw from commitment to their educational lives and divert their attention elsewhere -- to the adult world of work and family; for a small number whose families support them, to extended adolescence; or to the forced adulthood of street life.

A child's dropping out signifies a number of underlying problems, . . . The decision to drop out is rarely made impulsively. . . . in many cases [the dropout is] a person with serious personality and environmental conflicts, rather than an immature personality who simply decides to walk away from his responsibilities. (Beck and Muia 1980:15)

Low self-esteem, low expectations. Although few schools have developed strategies for early identification of potential dropouts (Council of Great City Schools 1985), research indicates that problems leading to dropout are detectable long before the decision is actualized. Blake (1973) recognized differences between dropouts and graduates that appeared as early as the late grade school years and which persisted five to seven years after the students left school. Dropouts, regardless of actual ability; as tested by the schools, had lower self-assessments of their academic ability, lower occupational aspirations, and more pronounced rebellious or delinquent behavioral patterns. This may be related to tracking into non-academic programs, as noted above, which students regard as indications that they are "losers". The director of one of our youth agency study sites was formerly a school psychologist. "The problems with school can be identified very early", she said. "I could walk into a kindergarten class and pick out those kids in trouble with school."

A long-term study comparing male dropouts and graduates found that dropouts, as a group, had lower self-esteem by junior high school (Bachmann, O'Malley and Johnston 1978). Indeed, the difference in self-esteem levels of the two groups was higher in grade eight than during the late teens or early 20s. Thus the action of dropping out did not precipitate low self-esteem; rather, dropout resulted from low self-esteem. Indeed, getting out of the school environment appeared to enhance the youths' low self-image somewhat. Still, as adults in their early 20s, these dropouts manifested higher rates of unemployment, greater drug use, and more aggressive behavior than graduates, despite their close similarity in wages, job status, and job satisfaction.

Drawing together findings from a wide range of studies of school failures and school leavers, Weber and Silvani-Lacey (1983) developed a list of characteristics of potential and actual dropouts. Table Five presents their synthesis. Academically, at-risk students and school leavers are behind grade, test poorly, and are not positively oriented toward academic achievement. Among at-risk students, lack of self-esteem articulates itself in unwillingness to try things; social isolation; withdrawal from school activities, social and academic; and an active, acted out dislike of school. Among dropouts these characteristics become more clearly articulated in self-defeating, isolating, and hostile behaviors. Poor attendance and, as noted above, low family economic and educational background are also typical of the potential and actual school leaver.

TABLE FIVE
Characteristics of Potential and Actual Dropouts

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Potential Dropouts</u>	<u>Actual Dropouts</u>
Cognitive	<p>Are at least one year behind their grade level in reading and mathematics achievement</p> <p>Are academically below average and have a trend of declining grades</p> <p>Exhibit a lack of goal orientation in school</p> <p>Are classified as slow learners (IQs of 75 to 90) or have a mean IQ of 90</p> <p>Seldom question or reason critically</p>	<p>Score low on intelligence tests (mean IQ = 90)</p> <p>Have repeated at least one grade</p> <p>Have limited academic success accompanied by poor academic performance</p> <p>Read poorly, have poor computational skills, and tend to show little or no improvement in either area</p>
Affective	<p>Demonstrate failure syndrome by habitually refusing to try and by being easily discouraged</p> <p>Manifest low self-esteem</p> <p>Are categorized by teachers as uncooperative, inattentive, and unmotivated</p> <p>Display an active dislike of school</p> <p>Feel alienated, isolated, insecure, and inadequate</p> <p>Do not participate in school affairs</p> <p>Are socially immature</p> <p>Are not accepted by teachers</p>	<p>Are loners and feel alienated from the school environment itself, from teachers, and from peers</p> <p>Are not accepted or respected by teachers</p> <p>Tend to lack interest in school or schoolwork</p> <p>Have a low self-concept, evidence little satisfaction with self, and exhibit characteristics of social immaturity</p> <p>Are either hostile and unruly or passive and apathetic</p>
Other	<p>Have poor attendance records</p> <p>Are older than their grade-level peers</p> <p>Come from low socioeconomic backgrounds frequently accompanied by a lack of parental emphasis on the importance of education</p> <p>Have parents whose own educational attainment level is low</p>	<p>Are sixteen to seventeen years of age and are older than their classmates at the time they leave school</p> <p>Are members of low income families in which neither parent finished high school</p> <p>Are from weak or broken homes</p> <p>Are not encouraged by parents to stay in school or are actually encouraged by them to leave school to contribute to family support</p> <p>Tend to be members of a minority group</p> <p>Display excessive absenteeism or irregular attendance</p> <p>Do not participate in extracurricular activities</p>

Source: Weber and Silvani-Lacey 1983:3-4

Self-protection through alternative values. Youth at risk of dropping out and, especially, youth out of school articulate ambivalent or hostile attitudes toward education. Dropouts aggressively reject the values of the school, including the importance of literacy, in order to validate the out-of-school, marginal world in which they find themselves. They choose to reject the school world, thus masking their experience of its having rejected them. Often this rejection is articulated in personal dislike for the schooling system. Some youth met during this study responded with categorical negatives such as "School stinks", and "Basically you've got rotten teachers; they're just there for the money." However many dropout youth internalize and individualize their experiences, remarking, for example, "Schools are ok, but it's not the kind of place for me"; "I'm too independent for that kind of system. I don't like having to be somewhere all the time"; "I work and learn better on my own"; and "I'm unable to cope with the classroom procedures and doing things as a group." Such remarks reflect confusion about whether the "system" is not made for them or whether they are not made for the schooling "system".

In his insightful study of minority dropouts, Raymond McDermott (1974) realized that school failure must be recognized as an "achievement". "By learning how to act in ways condemned by the host community" -- in the case of McDermott's study the white, school world -- youth "achieved" status as "pariahs", creating a situation in which the school rejected them (through academic failure or discipline). Rejection by the school confirmed their expectations of rejection by the white, "straight" world, expectations developed because of racial discrimination and rejection in other aspects of their lives.

Like McDermott's minority youth, many early school leavers have experienced rejection from the "host community", in most cases originating in their own homes and families, a rejection which comes to permeate other areas of their lives -- including the school -- and which they recreate by "achieving school failure". As with the black youth in McDermott's study, school failure for these noncompleters results not from lack of intelligence or other learning handicap, but from the cycle of failure and rejection they have internalized during their childhood. Such dropouts, then, see themselves as cast out from education at the same time that they experience themselves as having failed in that arena of life as well as others. They reject school values and protect themselves from the experience of victimization by the schools by reorienting themselves to the anti-school, anti-authority, anti-adult street culture.

The street youth with whom we met articulated both in words and actions the need to recreate a "host community" in which they were, perhaps for the first time, accepted on their own terms. The street culture, with its alternative, anti-school values, becomes home and family for them. Experiencing themselves rejected by adults -- parents and teachers -- street youth turn to peers with parallel experiences for support. The youth-serving agencies serve as locus for many street youths' new community.

The alternative values of community, peer support, assistance with basic necessities, and rejection of institutions designed to assist and control young people form a protective set of norms within which street youth can function in a hostile environment and come to view their street lives, regardless of their difficulty, in a positive light and their decision to leave school and home as a positive choice.

Lack of interest, not lack of ability. A group of Jewish teenagers who were model students in their public school, but academically unsuccessful, often truant, and discipline problems in their after-school Hebrew school classes illustrate the importance of positive attitude toward the goals of the school (Schoen 1982). These students were high in academic ability and achievement in public school and actively involved in school life, taking leading roles in student organizations. At their parents' behest they also attended Hebrew school, but, when interviewed, reported that they felt the curriculum at Hebrew school was unimportant for their lives and future success. They simply chose not to invest their time, interest, and energy in the Hebrew school for, unlike their parents, they did not believe it was relevant to their lives.

Lack of commitment to the goals of the school and low expectations for achievement or for reward through achievement in school, then, are the key factors. When high school dropouts have been retested and more closely assessed, studies (e.g., Beck and Muia 1980, Weidman and Friedmann 1984, see above) have found that, despite poor in-school testing responses, most school leavers possess the intellectual ability to complete their curricula. The problems leading to dropout lie more in attitudinal areas. Youths' attitudes in turn reflect the social environment we have created for them.

Social indicators of disconnection. The increasing stress and distress in the lives of American youth appear in alarming statistics that find their way into our daily newspapers. For example:

- o 600,000 juveniles support themselves through prostitution.
- o In 1982 there were 924,000 reported cases of child neglect and abuse, an increase of 45% over 5 years previous.
- o 1 million teenage girls become pregnant each year; the rate of teen pregnancy increased 109% for whites and 10% for non-whites between 1960 and 1980. 8 of 10 mothers under 17 never finish school.
- o Suicides among white teenagers rose 177% between 1950 and 1980, while among non-white teenagers suicides rose 162%; the overall rate of suicide of 16- to 24-year-olds doubled from 1960 to 1980.
- o Homicides committed by white teenagers rose 232% between 1950 and 1978.

- o In 1980 there were 1 million runaways, up from 600,000 in 1970; annually 150,000 runaway youth simply disappear and must be presumed dead.
- o The years 1960 to 1980 witnessed a 600% rise in teenage drug arrests and a 300% rise in teen drinking arrests.
- o Youth under 21 accounted for half of all arrests for serious crimes in 1980.

These drastic increases in youth abuse, pregnancy, suicide, crime, and disappearance are even more dramatic when the overall decrease in the number of youth is taken into account.

Alienated youth. The estimates of youth who are opting out of education, without engaging themselves in productive activity in the adult world seem to grow ever more dire. In 1979 the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education estimated that perhaps 6% of youth were disengaged from both school and work. In 1985 the Education Commission of the States estimated that 10 to 15% of all American youth are alienated -- runaways, dropouts, unemployed and workers unable to keep jobs, or criminals.

Two-thirds of the students we are concerned about drop out because they have given up on school as a vehicle for their success. They do not believe it will work for them because it hasn't worked for them all their lives. They do not have the desire, hope and motivation that schools tend to reward. Schools are for someone else. In disconnecting from school, these teens disconnect from the values and ideals the schools embody and promote. To use the phrase that became the title of the Carnegie Council on Children's final report, these young men and women see "small futures" for themselves. (Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Council 1985:11)

Dropouts are higher than average in poor social and personal adjustment, aggressive behavior, impulsiveness, early drinking, drug use, and delinquency (McDill, Natriello, and Pallas 1985:17). While many early school leavers will go on to lead productive, self-sufficient, and self-satisfying lives, others find themselves caught in a cycle of limited employability that undermines their already weak self-concept. Yet, these are youth who have taken great risk -- leaving school and home -- and achieved much, at least basic survival, in a highly hostile environment. Despite their success as "survivors", they have internalized the home/school world's assessment of them as "losers". These young people will grow into unhappy and unproductive adults, leading dependent or meager existences outside the mainstream of American life. As dropouts they will have limited ability to maintain not only employment, but ties to family and community.

. . . the general dropout process is dependent on the youth's [lack of] integration into the community social structure, particularly the level of continuity among the demands of the school, family, and community contexts. Of crucial importance are the roles occupied by youths in all three general contexts and the relationships between the youth and the significant others in those contexts. . . . The greater the youth's social integration into nondeviant social groups and contexts (both academic and community), and the more congruent the rewards of significant others within those social groups and contexts, the less likely the youth will be to exhibit deviant behavior (dropout and/or delinquency). (Weidman and Friedmann 1984:30)

If young people attribute their difficulties to others, i.e., to external, unjust or arbitrary causes, these authors find, they will gravitate toward delinquency. If, however, they blame themselves, attributing their reduced circumstances and prospects to personal inadequacy, they will become school (and social) dropouts (Weidman and Friedmann 1984:32). It is these self-blaming, alienated, yet ultimately highly resourceful young people who are the concern of this report.

CHAPTER III

LIFE OUT OF SCHOOL

In this chapter we will consider what happens to young people who leave school early. A minority go directly on to alternative education, many seek and some find work, others just stay at home, while for still others leaving school serves as a way to get away from their homes. These last usually end up on the streets and appear as clients of youth-serving agencies such as those studied here. This report is primarily concerned with these youth who are out-of-work and out-of-home, as well as out-of-school. A brief survey of youths' out-of-school options will place them in context.

Youth Lack Achievable Plans

School leavers may articulate positive plans for their life out of school, but, when faced with the difficulties that inevitably await them, they may find it impossible to persevere, just as many found continuation in the school environment impossible. While many youth have well-developed and reasoned motivations for terminating their schooling, they have a less than clear understanding of what life out of school will be like.

For many their lives -- in school and/or at home -- are unpleasant, perhaps untenable. The decision to leave school may be made for negative reasons, i.e., to escape to a less bad situation, but it still constitutes a reasonable alternative from the point of view of the young person. In-school youth have only very limited understanding of how difficult independent living can be. Youth agency staff remark that the easiest way to spot new runaways is the enthusiasm that they have for street life. While seasoned street kids may well say they would rather be there than anywhere else they know, they do not find their lives enjoyable and; indeed, hold starry-eyed newcomers and part-time, "weekend warriors" in contempt.

Dropouts are adolescents, and, even more than their age-mates in school, are present-, not future-oriented. Independent planning and weighing among alternatives are not tasks at which they have had a great deal of experience. There is also much about the adult world they simply do not

know. While some find satisfactory employment, succeed in an alternative educational program, or make a solid start at family life, many others find that such expectations are not fulfilled.

A survey of dropouts from Phoenix, Arizona, schools illustrates teens' unrealistic expectations for their out-of-school lives. Table Six lists dropouts' plans at the time they left school and their actual activities the following fall. Less than half of those who planned to work were employed (52.8% vs. 25.8%). Less than half of those who intended to continue their education were in GED or job training programs (43.5% vs. 21.0%). Only 46.8% of the school leavers reported that they were working or studying and, since some were doing both, the group productively engaged in employment or education constitutes substantially less than half the Phoenix dropouts.

TABLE SIX

Early School Leavers' Planned and Actual
Education and Employment Activities

Plans at Time of Dropout			Activities Following Dropout		
Employment		52.8%	Employment		25.8%
Have a job	15.7				
Seek a job	37.1				
Education		43.5%	Education		21.0%
GED	26.6		Work on GED	12.4	
Trade/vocational training	16.9		On-the-job training	8.6	
Other			Other		
No education planned	19.1		"Sit around"	28.1	
"Rest"	15.1		Dropped out of GED/training	14.2	
			In trouble with the law	10.9	

Note: More than one answer may be given, therefore figures do not sum to 100%.

Source: Phoenix Union High School 1980

Educational Alternatives

Only a few enroll. Less than one in four school leavers takes further education (Peng 1983). In the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey, 25% of boys and just 17% of girls had gone on to any educational training within the first two to three years of dropping out of school. A mere 14% of boys and 9% of girls had enrolled in courses

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that would lead to the alternative high school diploma, the GED. By age 30, 26% of white dropouts had taken some schooling, but only 11% of Blacks had gone back to educational training. That is, Blacks are more likely to drop out, and, moreover, are only half as likely to return for schooling.

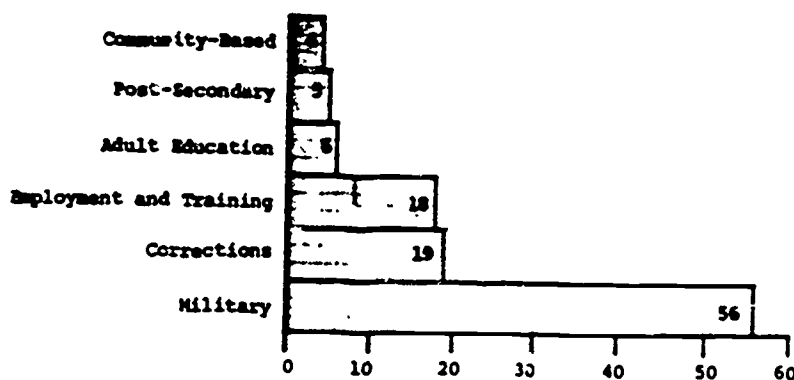
Literacy programs. Generally, youth are under-represented in literacy tutoring programs. The California state literacy campaign attracted only 1% of its students from the 16- to 21-year-old group (Lane and McGuire 1984). Although peer tutoring was an aspect of the program, tutors were not young: 1% of tutors were under 21; just 7% were 18- to 23-year-olds.

Nationally, only 9% of enrollees in all types of literacy programs -- public adult education (ABE and ASE), employment and training programs, correctional institution programs, post-secondary institutions, community-based volunteer programs, and the military -- are in the 16- to 20-year-old group (Lerche 1985).

Figure Seven breaks down these youthful participants by type of program. Note that only the military, employment and training programs, and correctional institutions enroll significant proportions of youth (youth make up 56%, 18%, and 19% of their enrollees, respectively). State and local adult education programs, post-secondary institutions (primarily community colleges), and community-based programs attract few tutees from among youth (under-20s are just 6%, 5%, and 4% of their respective students).

FIGURE SEVEN

Proportion of 16- to 20-Year-Olds Enrolled in Literacy Programs, by Program Type



Source: Lerche 1985

Neither the military nor employment and training programs accept very low level readers, thus only correctional institutions are serving sizable numbers of youth who are categorical or near-illiterates. Indeed, looking at literacy training of all types, the 16- to 20-year-old cohort has the smallest proportion of very low level readers (34%) enrolled of any age group (Lerche 1985).

Community-based literacy programs, including volunteer literacy organizations, are least successful in attracting youth. They often concentrate on services for very low level readers, services youth either feel they do not need or will not accept through currently offered program formats.

GED programs. Each year \$100 million are spent on publicly-supported adult education programs. All categories of public adult education programs are full to capacity and maintain waiting lists. Just 28.9% of these public dollars go toward Adult Secondary Education (ASE), the programs that would directly serve most native English-speaking out-of-school youth. Under-21-year-olds constitute about one-third to one-half of the ASE students each year. Yet only 4% of all those enrolled in adult education lack a high school diploma. Few youthful dropouts, then, are enrolled in publicly-funded degree-completion programs.

The GED is regarded as a viable educational option only by dropouts who left school with solid academic records. Youth agency staff report that many youth left school planning to take the GED. They have little conception of the difficulties that await them, either from its academic program or from the decrease in structure and educational orientation that their out-of-school lives present. They do not have the self-discipline to pursue such a program, especially if they left school in part because of problems with structure, responsibility, and authority. Most failing or near-failing school leavers do not consider themselves adequately prepared for these alternative degree programs (Austin Independent School District 1982).

The most frequently cited reason that GED test-takers give for pursuing their their diploma is "job-related" (Education Daily, September 9, 1985). Thus the GED programs must be seen as "creaming" the dropout population -- attracting those who have been able to secure employment, employment with some expectation of advance and security. GED test-takers in 1984 averaged 24 years of age; they were mostly workers who were returning to school after a number of years on the job, not recent, unemployed dropouts.

Additionally, significant numbers of school non-completers receive their GED in the military. In 1984, military programs conferred 18,000 certificates. These programs, too, exclude very low skilled youth.

In the study state, 12.3% of dropouts from grades nine through twelve had returned to high school and an additional 9.7% were enrolled in GED programs when they were interviewed the following year (Department of Education 1980). The earlier in their schooling that students dropped

out, the less likely they were to have plans to return to education. Most school leavers in this state (82.8%) reported that they planned to continue their educations. Some cited several alternative plans: 30.3% planned GED work, 40.0% wanted to attend community college, 11.7% expected to return to high school, 13.0% intended to attend vocational training, 15.9% cited plans for alternative high school diploma programs, and 10.2% hoped to enroll in college. Judging from the above statistics on adult education enrollment, few of these ambitious plans will be realized.

Employment training. Although decreasing in number, there are also publicly-funded employment training programs for which some out-of-school youth qualify. However, only a small minority of the dropout population is served. The largest of these, the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) is designed for dropouts, but restricts enrollment to those who can demonstrate that they read at the grade nine level. Thus JTPA, like most other job training and pre-employment orientation programs, is open only to youth with relatively high academic skills.

Recreating failure. Literacy programs do not recruit youth. The GED attracts only the academically more secure. Job training programs address only the needs of the more skilled. The less well-prepared, the less confident, and all youth who have difficulties with course structure, classroom practices, and social environments like those of the schools they have left fall outside the scope of these opportunities.

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the school environment appears to have undermined the already low self-esteem of many students, leading them to drop out. A replication of the school environment in conventional adult education and employment training programs promises to recreate an environment for failure from which the youth have fled. Chapter V, below, takes up this issue in some detail and suggests alternative educational approaches which can assist literacy programs in overcoming these obstacles.

Dropping Out to Work

Short-term employability. The prospect of employment is a strong positive motivation to young people considering leaving school. Despite high youth unemployment rates, this hope is not without some basis. For example, a study of early school leavers in Austin, Texas, in the summer following their departure from school found that 71% of dropouts were employed (Austin Independent School District 1982). Half of Austin's dropouts reported that they saw no disadvantages in having left school.

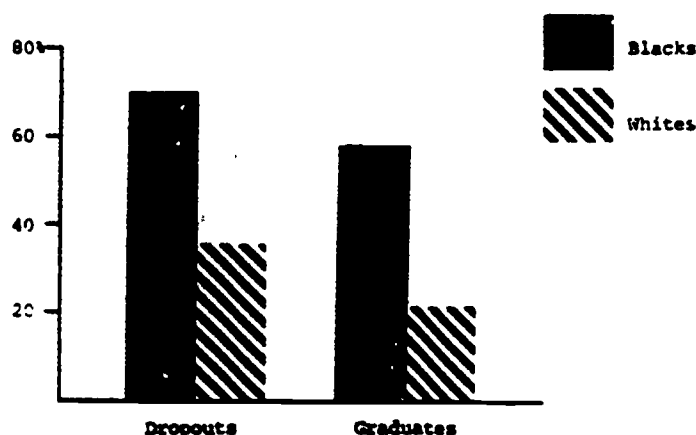
In the study state, 68.9% of dropouts interviewed mentioned work as an activity they had engaged in since leaving school, although relatively few had cited work as a reason for leaving school (see Table Four, Chapter II, above). Fully 45.6% of school leavers were employed at the time of the interview (Department of Education 1980).

Nationally, higher employability and expectation of higher-than-average wages for this age group motivate many teens in vocational and technical programs to drop out of school (Fine and Rosenberg 1983). At an annual 15.1% rate of dropout, these most-employable youth are also the most likely to leave school and enter the world of work early.

However, nongraduates are generally not competitive with graduates in the labor market, as Figure Eight indicates. In 1982 both black and white nongraduates were far more likely to be unemployed than graduates in their ethnic group. A 1979 survey reports that this was somewhat less true of Hispanic youth, finding 19.9% of Hispanic graduates unemployed, compared to 24.7% of Hispanic dropouts (Young 1983:2).

FIGURE EIGHT

Percent Unemployment of High School Graduates and Non-Completers, by Race, 1982



Source: Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Commission 1985:15

Yet, for those who do gain employment, dropping out has positive, not negative, effects on income at least in the short term (Papagiannis, Bickel, and Fuller 1983). Indeed, 18-year-old dropouts with several years in the workforce are often more valued employees than new high school graduates, though this advantage reverses itself by the time they reach their mid-20s.

Rates of dropout by ethnicity do not reflect labor market accessibility. Minority teenagers are least successful on the labor market, yet a larger proportion of non-white youth leave school without completion (see Figure Eight, above). In November 1985, for example, the U.S. Department of Labor reported a 34.9% unemployment rate for black teens, compared with a

17.3% general teenage unemployment rate, at a period of 7.0% unemployment in the overall workforce.

For black students, dropping out holds great likelihood of leading to unemployment, as the 71% rate of black dropouts' unemployment in Figure Eight also indicates. Yet, staying in school alters this prospect for only one fifth of these youth: 58% of black high school graduates were unemployed in 1982. Further, in looking about them, black youth can see that ethnicity and socioeconomic status weigh heavily against them in the labor market. In 1979 white high school dropouts had higher labor market success than did Blacks with some college education (Fine and Rosenberg 1983:262).

Long-term prospects. While the decision to drop out of school may be motivated by the reasonable desire to earn money and at least some expectation that this might be possible, leaving school has dire effects on long-term employability and on lifetime earnings. Twenty-five percent of all families headed by school dropouts live in poverty. Female-headed households are most likely to be poor, and those headed by dropout women are by far most disadvantaged: 49% of families headed by female dropouts live below the poverty line (Fine and Rosenberg 1983:264).

Not only are dropouts often without work, they are often seen as unemployable. While the pool of young people entering the labor market declines in number, the percentage who are not prepared for the work world is increasing. One study argues that employers will soon face the necessity of hiring -- and training -- 16- to 24-year-olds whom they would have passed over in former decades.

The entry-level laborpool, then, contains more and more of the kinds of teenagers employers have been able to overlook in the past: poorly motivated, lacking in fundamental literacy skills and unacquainted with the responsibilities and demands of the work world. (Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Commission 1985:5)

The National Center for Education Statistics' study cited above interviewed young dropouts at the time they would have graduated from high school and found that 27% of those wishing to work were unemployed or sufficiently dissatisfied with their work that they were actively seeking employment. The majority regretted having dropped out of school (Peng 1983).

Thus, while many youths leave school in order to enter the workforce and some are successful in finding and keeping employment, increasing numbers are drifting away from school without any viable alternative, lacking the skills to seek access to the world of work, and, in many cases, lacking an orientation toward employment and the adult world.

The Teen Family

Pregnancy and plans to start a family are a major, in some studies the leading (Sherraden 1985), reason that girls leave school early. One in four female dropouts is pregnant at the time she leaves school (Peng 1983). Many more cite plans to marry as a reason for terminating their education.

One million teenagers give birth each year, often to underweight babies whose prognosis for physical and intellectual development is below average. Annually, approximately 150,000 teenagers give birth to their third child.

Over the past decade these young mothers have tended increasingly to keep their babies; few return to school. GED participation is also proportionally lower for girls than for boys (9% vs. 14%).

Dropout girls' workforce participation is lower than that of women overall. A large majority of teen mothers raise their children on welfare. In California, 99% of dropout mothers were drawing public assistance to support their young families (Camp, et al. 1980).

As we have seen above (Chapter II), low educational attainment of the mother is a strong indicator of dropout in daughters. The teen family thus tends to repeat itself, and its numbers are growing.

Life on the Streets

Runaways and "throw aways". Even more grim statistics apply to street kids. These are young people for whom there are few services and little hope that they will return to schooling and mainstream life. In recent years their plight has become more widely publicized, but most schools still cannot effectively reach out to them.

Each year one million children between 11 and 17 years of age run away from American homes. These numbers are increasing rapidly: In 1970, among a numerically larger youth cohort, there were 600,000 runaways -- a figure almost doubled by 1980. Only a minority of runaway youth are reported missing by their families. Most of those who do not soon return to their homes end up living on the streets, where 80% sell themselves sexually to survive. Estimates place the number of juvenile prostitutes at well over 500,000, with the average age just 15 (Elkind 1984). Girls as young as 9 years old can be found among the juvenile prostitutes. Many are 12 to 14. Indeed, there is high demand among clients for preteen girls and boys.

These "throw away" youth are leaving situations more intolerable than the violence and exploitation they face on the streets. One observer states that:

These kids aren't looking for a '60s-style hippie adventure. Many leave home because living there has become impossible for them. Most are fleeing turbulent households racked by conflict, violence, neglect, and -- in a disturbingly high percentage of cases -- sexual abuse. (McCall 1983:35)

A survey of juvenile prostitutes in Seattle revealed that 37% had been sexually molested, 57% had been raped, and 67% had experienced physical abuse while still in their homes (City Club Juvenile Justice Subcommittee 1985). Runaways, those youth who will become street kids:

. . . don't live long -- 150,000 disappear each year. They also suffer from malnutrition, drug-related disorders, sexual dysfunction, and, having little access to medical care (runaways don't have health insurance), from diseases of all types. A major cause of death among boys engaged in prostitution is rectal hemorrhage. (Elkind 1983:196-97)

A Roman Catholic priest who runs youth shelters states that:

I've never met one boy or girl prostitute who didn't start as a runaway. . . . Kids don't ordinarily run away from warm loving families. And those who do almost invariably return home. (McCall 1983:42)

In the site city, youth agency workers estimated that over half the families from which their runaway and street youth clients had come were homes in which alcoholism was a fact of life and that 90 to 95% of the juvenile prostitutes had been sexually abused at home.

Physical and sexual abuse of the minors often followed from addictions in the household. The streets, too, are full of drugs and alcohol. Youths take drugs in part to dull their perceptions of what is happening to them. Girls, many observers report, become drug-dependent through their pimps, who supply them in order to keep them under their control, while boys who are prostituting themselves take drugs, as one youth worker put it, "so they can't think about the unthinkable."

Survival strategies. Although the streets, for young, inexperienced youth, are far more violent, more demanding, and more difficult than they could have imagined, many youth find some positive supports and experiences in the streets that they have not found at home. Earning money, regardless of the means, creates a sense of power and control. Indeed, the act of leaving home, of taking any affirmative step out of an abusive situation, is experienced positively. And, for many youth, an early acquaintance is a pimp or other illegitimate sponsor who promises security, safety, and affection, though the young people find that these promises are not fulfilled, or fulfilled at very high personal cost.

For street youth, their friends are the most important thing in life. One of our study's interviewees, a 19-year-old who had dropped out of school and run away from home at age 16, said of the drop-in center she frequented:

The Way In is a family. It's the only place these kids can go where they're treated like human beings. There are other kids here like them who understand and care about them. . . . If I could, I'd buy a big house around it [near the shelter]. . . and I'd give them what they need: food, shelter, and counselling.

There are many tight friendships among pairs or small groups of boys or girls and also close, sometimes stable couples. Among street couples, one party may prostitute to support both of them. For example, one boy was prostituting while his girlfriend was pregnant and could not "work" as a prostitute herself. These personal relationships are intense and all-important, as consuming and passionate as friendships and sexual partnerships are for most teenagers. Youth tend to follow best friends to the streets and to stay if they find a best friend out on the street. One 17-year-old boy had come to Your House to try to get back on the path to home and school after two years out primarily because his girlfriend had stayed in school:

When I want to go home, it's not that I don't like it here [in the streets]. It's just that I miss my girlfriend, M____. . . . Well, my plans are to get a job, of course, then get me and M____ an apartment. M____ is still going to school because she is only in the eleventh grade, so she has one more year to finish. I'm also planning on getting married, depending on how things are going for me and M____. . . .

Local youth agency staff frequently commented on the positive aspects of street life, as perceived by their clients, noting that removing youth from the streets isolated them not only from physical dangers and emotional damage, but also from friends and support:

[These kids get] pride in making money, surviving, not in the methods for doing so. Those who are not depending on prostitution, drug dealing, crime, or some other form of illegal behavior are not really "street kids" according to the other street kids. They are seen as a notch up.

[You have to] remember that these [street] relationships may be the only supportive relationships these kids have known.

To leave home . . . is to take charge of their lives, to get some independence, and perhaps to replace home life with something better. . . .

Kids are starry-eyed about how it will be [on the streets].

Although the most lucrative incomes -- and those are marginal at best -- come through prostitution, street youth also engage in other forms of illegitimate activity. For example, one youth we met reported that he supported himself through "cat burglary", under the supervision of adult criminals. Any activity other than prostitution is considered a step up. Youth try to move from prostitution into petty drug dealing. Many

youth get by on almost no income, eating out of garbage bins, running various scams, panhandling, and sleeping in abandoned buildings, out-of-doors, or pooling money together with 10 or 15 other youth to rent a single flophouse room.

Youth who are "legit" -- have legal employment -- pride themselves on this fact. One of this study's interviewees, an older youth who had been on the streets for many years, talked about his own jobs -- part-time manual labor -- as a clear step up from the prostitution and petty crime with which he had previously supported himself. He suggested that anyone who wanted to really know youth life:

. . . should come down and live on the streets for a while to get a sense of what it's like. . . . I've seen a lot more violence than I'd care to. [Kids have to] help each other, but you've got to rely on yourself.

This youth, from his position as both a streetwise person and "legit", does spend his time and money trying to provide support to younger street kids.

Adult shelters and services for the homeless are not open to youth. Under-18-year-olds cannot, for legal reasons, be accommodated at adult centers. And shelter services for youth are even more limited than those for adults. Federal allocations for homeless youth amounted to \$21 million in 1983, providing for a runaway hotline and shelter services for 45,000 youth -- admittedly just a fraction of the population. In Seattle, for example, there are 6,000 reported runaways annually and a large, visible street youth population, but just one 8-bed youth shelter (McCall 1983). Further, most street youth are contemptuous of the adult homeless population, especially chronic alcoholics, sometimes leading to avoidance of adult hang-out districts and sometimes to serious confrontations in the streets. Adult prostitutes and their pimps, for example, regard juveniles as unwelcome competition. In some sections, adult derelicts and street youth compete for the same handouts, the same garbage bins.

In some situations youth find it advantageous, however, to impersonate adults. Many secure fake ID cards so that they can sell their blood. Those involved in prostitution often pretend to be of age if they are arrested, in order to protect their pimps and johns.

Youth under 18 come into frequent contact with legal authorities, for the mere fact that they live independently makes them status offenders. In some cities they are regularly picked up for investigation, checks against missing child lists, internment in juvenile homes or return to their own homes, and various types of interventions. Once 18, youth must commit some criminal activity to come to the attention of the police. Some youths eagerly await their eighteenth birthdays, when their juvenile police records are sealed and they can start life anew. Others anticipate their eighteenth birthdays with trepidation: Their illegal activities will be punished with adult justice and their access to youth services, such as counselling at service centers, legal support, and Medicaid assistance, will disappear.

Further, for many youthful prostitutes the end of the teens brings the threat of loss of income. The capacity of boys, especially, to sell their sexual services declines rapidly as they become adults. Agency staff note that males either shift to pimping for younger females or to other illegal professions as they reach their late teens.

Coming of age on the streets. Street youth range from preteens to post-20s. The process of breaking away from home is usually gradual. Most youth run away from home for a short period, perhaps several times, before making the decision to leave and not return. Other youth frequent the streets part-time, going home during the week and hanging out, perhaps prostituting for extra money on the weekends. They see the street life as attractive, exciting, lucrative, since they are not really trying to survive there. "Baby runaways", those who have been on their own less than two months, are the most likely to appear at halfway houses and attempt to reenter their previous lives. Street kids are considered "seasoned" if they have been out for two years or more; these youth are extremely unlikely to turn to adults for such assistance.

One local youth counsellor described three categories within the street youth population, each requiring a different approach. Most reachable are the "chicken soup and band-aid kids", youngsters who need support, nurturance, and character-building help and whom intervention can lead back to normal lives. Next most approachable are "crisis intervention kids", youth who have been out-of-home short or medium lengths of time and are in severe need of immediate, intensive help. These youth are approachable around the specific problem that brings them to adult attention -- via a shelter, a crisis line, or an arrest, for example. Most alienated are those he characterizes as "terminal bleeders", youth who have been on the streets for a long time and whom this counsellor regards as virtually beyond reach. Over half the street youth population are "terminal bleeders", he fears.

A Seattle youth worker is somewhat more optimistic about the proportion of the street youth who are "rehabilitatable" with proper intervention. Her descriptions are of "babies", 11- to 13-year-olds who have health, drug, pregnancy, and emotional problems, but whom we can reach and "raise"; "room for movement kids", those who need intensive, patient, and long-term work; and "marginals", those seriously involved in illegal sexual and criminal activities and who are seriously disturbed and unreachable. The "room for movement kids", damaged but reachable youth, she feels, constitute the majority of the street population (James 1985).

By both these assessments, a substantial portion of the street youth are so distant from the concerns and lives of conventional adolescents and so deeply entrenched in the street world of crime and violence that there is little hope that they can be reconnected to mainstream society. These observers expect that such youth will live out their lives as outsiders to society, probably as career criminals and drug addicts.

These prospects for lives of deprivation and desperation are far from the consciousness of the young people as they struggle for daily survival. Street youth are highly present-oriented. The future, as one agency

staff member put it, "is a medium that does not exist for them." They do not plan. As they get closer to age 18, the end of their legal juvenile status, some become more concerned with the short-term future and the changes their altered status will bring. But generally, youth see only the activity of the moment. This need to live in the present stands in the way of work or educational activities. According to one counsellor:

The kind of lifestyle they lead doesn't lend itself to steady work. They have little sense of time schedules or regular commitment or, more practically, crises are always popping up. They have to scrounge rent money or a friend's bail money, they have to leave town to avoid the cops, or they're busted overnight. . . . They may have good intentions, but more immediate situations arise that prevent them from following up. They lose the job and their sense of failure and inadequacy is reinforced.

Like youth everywhere, street kids have hopes and dreams. They spend a great deal of time fantasizing about how life might be, in part to deaden the reality of how violent life really is. Stories of miraculous rescues from the street life regularly make the rounds. Like all apocryphal stories, they always happened to someone that someone else knew or knew of. Among street kids, the fairy tale is usually some version of the youthful prostitute who gets picked up by a john who, upon realizing that she/he is just a kid, takes the youth home, provides all the necessities -- including platonic love -- and sends the youth on to school and a happy new start on life. Street youth desperately need to believe that there is a "Daddy Warbucks" out there waiting for them, that there is a family they might someday have, that some adults will serve as parents who would love and nurture and appreciate them.

These fantasies are very unlikely to be fulfilled. Nor are the youths' more modest hopes that they might just be like other teenagers -- having lives whose most serious crisis is what to wear on a date or which sort of haircut to sport. Street youth, for all that they are troubled and for all that they must be self-reliant in the only ways they know how, are still adolescents, with the same hopes and desires. According to one agency staff member:

In many ways they're no different from other kids. There are many similarities between the kids at The Way In or at Your House, particularly regarding interests in music, stars, clothes, appearance in general. . . . Their priorities are the same as other kids. But it's just not practical or possible, given their lifestyles, for them to cater to these interests. . . . The difference with street kids is their situation, not their identities.

Hoping to help others like herself to see a way out of the violence of the streets, an 18-year-old dropout from seventh grade asked a counsellor to post the following message on the public board at The Way In:

THE REALITY OF LIFE

I have experienced some verry real things in life and I feel that know one person should have to go through lifes hard core punishments so who ever reads this I want you to know that your not alone. I myself and others have some way been involved in either family problems or life on the streets. I am 18 years old and I have been living this day by day life for 7 years I think I have some of the same feelings as anyone else that has lived a disturbed life I know everyone is different but we still need to stop are problems befor its just to late. So If you feel like your problems are just moving out of hand search for help or at least find someone to share your mixed up feelings with Im real shure it would be better than carrying around a bunch of problems that you really dont need. Im for real about what I am saying and I myself am real It took a long time but I am. and so are you so please dont let it end befor you give it a chance.

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CHAPTER IV

CUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTHS' LITERACY SKILLS AND PRACTICES

Measures of Youth Literacy

Few are non-readers. There are only a small minority of American youth who are without any measurable reading and writing skills. A 1979 U.S. Census Bureau survey found only 0.2% of 14- to 24-year-olds who said they could not read when the margin of literacy was placed at the sixth grade level (U.S. Department of Commerce 1984:146). Although this study did not reach youth living outside established households, these very small numbers for non-readers are reflected in other research as well.

Most categorically non-reading youth, like many adults who have attended school but cannot read at all, suffer from a learning disability, in most cases undiagnosed (Gold and Johnson 1981). Estimates of the learning disabled range from 10 to 15% of the population, only 2% of whom are properly diagnosed by the schools (Dearman and Plisko 1980, Chall 1983). Most of these youth will experience academic difficulty and will drop out of school. Learning disabilities that lead to reading failure may stem from broad cognitive deficiencies, but more often undiagnosed learning disabilities are narrow, specific physiological problems that effectively prohibit decoding the written signal. For example, some children have visual motor impairment that makes the reading of sequenced letters a confusing process, retarding their reading, but not affecting their oral communication. In others left-right orientation problems lead to confusion of letters such as "b" and "d". Regardless of the extent of the verbal learning problem, the effect, if undiagnosed, is usually the same: The child does not learn, falls behind, and drops out of school. One of the dropouts with whom we conducted formal interviews mentioned a difficulty with "mixed up spelling", a probable learning disability.

Assessments of reading grade level. Estimates of dropouts' literacy levels suggest that, while there are few who cannot read, many have marginal literacy skills. Many dropouts' reading and writing skill levels may be inadequate for securing employment; poor literacy skills are, for many youth, barriers to participation in most job training programs.

Assessments of the reading abilities of out-of-school youth have to date been derived from school testing records and the academic histories of

school leavers. There is as yet no accurate assessment of the literacy skills of the youth who have left school. The partial investigations conducted for this study are reported in sections below.*

To extrapolate to out-of-school youth from school achievement records is to risk inaccuracy. But, generally, early school leavers, as a group, are in the lower ranks of school achievers. Since poor reading ability is widespread, even among high school completers, out-of-school youth must be presumed to have serious literacy skill inadequacies. Testing of high school seniors nationally reveals that many graduates, perhaps 50%, will not read at the twelfth grade level when they receive their diplomas (Park 1984). In districts with high dropout rates the figures are even higher. For example, a study in the Chicago city schools found 67% of graduates with below-grade-level reading achievement. When the dropout rate is taken into account, only 15% of Chicago youth enter adulthood with twelfth grade reading levels, the skill level which most observers now recommend as the minimum for the contemporary workplace (Dropouts: Shocking Enough to Get Our Attention? 1985).

Significant numbers of in-school youth read at levels far lower than accepted minimal standards. Estimates of the proportion of youth who are functionally illiterate vary, but reports using eighth grade reading ability as a minimum level for functional competency set the proportion of functionally illiterate youth at 10 to 13% (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983, Park 1984). These same reports estimate that 20 to 30% of early school leavers would be categorized as functional illiterates using the criterion of eighth grade ability. (There is widespread sentiment in the educational community that the minimum competency level for success in today's laborforce must be raised from eighth to twelfth grade level. This measure would place many more youth and, especially, out-of-school youth in the category of the unemployable.)

Disengagement from literacy. Many reading problems contributing to high school dropout emerge during the latter grade school years, when curricula shift from instruction primarily through oral communication to dependence on written materials. In the primary grades, reading and writing are explicitly taught, not used as sources for essential information. But, in about fourth grade, instruction shifts to reliance upon written material, not just for presenting things that children already know or are simultaneously taught through speech, but for information that is available only through the literacy channel. It is here, when comprehension through reading becomes essential, that disengagement from literacy and the school culture begins to emerge (Chall 1983).

Until the fourth grade, there are no discernible differences, for example, between middle and lower class children's reading achievement. But, as the instructional shift away from learning through listening to

*The results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress' (NAEP) Young Adult Literacy Assessment, scheduled for publication in late spring 1986, should provide better information on the topic. See Chapter VI for a description of this forthcoming study.

learning through reading begins to take place, socioeconomic stratification of reading ability also emerges (Chall 1983). This same social stratification will ultimately be replicated in the numbers of students who leave school without completion.

Verbal ability. Generally low reading grade level reports mask variation within the population of early school leavers and, for many youth, fail to accurately reflect their literacy achievement. Thus the out-of-school youth population does not represent uniform literacy training needs nor uniform potential to achieve higher literacy skill levels.

As we have seen in Chapter II, for many youth it is not lack of ability, but lack of interest and personal investment in the goals of the school that leads to dropout, both for students whose records indicate academic failure and those who exhibited academic success. Such disengaged students do not perform up to their potential on standardized tests, for a number of reasons: They do not apply themselves to a task whose outcome they regard as of little consequence to their lives; they are distracted by non-school concerns such as family problems; they lack test-taking skills or the emotional security required to perform well under time pressure. We cannot assume that last-available test scores, often recorded at a point close to a student's decision to leave school, accurately reflect either reading and writing achievement or verbal aptitude.

Individuals may have well developed skills in some verbal skills areas and be lacking in others, depending on the point at which they became disengaged from the learning process. The early school years instill word decoding and analytic skills, so almost all school leavers are able to process written text (Chall 1983). At some later, individually determined point, when higher cognitive skills are required, a student may stop investing time and attention in school work. But this may be long before the act of dropping out of school. Thus two dropouts from the tenth grade may have very different literacy skills and training needs.

Further, since dropout is not predicated solely, nor indeed primarily, on failure in school, out-of-school youth represent the whole range of innate intellectual ability. The studies cited in Chapter II indicate that less than half the students leaving school early are failing and that well over half of school leavers could complete their curricula.

Few studies have attempted to ascertain the actual abilities of students who have dropped out of school. Rather, most just take the last in-school standardized test scores as evidence. However, Fine and Rosenberg (1983) measured verbal ability, rather than reading achievement. They found that actual verbal ability was not congruent with school reading test records. School leavers tend to have a low IQ or low reading ability, but the first cannot be assumed by testing the latter. Out-of-school young men tested lower on verbal ability than the average. On the other hand, women and minorities who had dropped out of school had higher-than-average ability, although this was not necessarily reflected in their school grade averages. A startling proportion, 19%, of the early school leavers tested as gifted.

A second study of verbal ability, rather than reading achievement, also indicates that inability to acquire literacy or intellectual difficulties with literacy acquisition cannot be assumed among out-of-school youth. Richardson and Gerlach (1980), testing black youth for general intellectual ability, found that black dropouts had higher IQs than did black high school graduates, but that black dropouts were far less likely to perceive school as a ladder to social mobility than black school completers.

At the other end of the scale, the out-of-school youth population can be expected to contain a larger-than-average number of learning disabled persons with specific difficulties relating to literacy acquisition. As in the non-disabled youth population, their general intellectual ability will not be reflected in their academic success in school.

Functions for Literacy in Youth Life

The orality of youth culture. The lives of out-of-school youth are dominated not by literacy, but by orality. They conduct their essential transactions orally. They receive most information through spoken channels -- mostly from peers, but also conversations with adults such as parents and social service agency staff. They are highly reliant upon records, tapes, radio, and television as entertainment and information channels. Youth are highly sensitive to the subtleties of verbal language and quick to detect patronization, manipulation, and attempts to mislead.

A disproportionate number of dropouts come from ethnic minority groups and working class backgrounds, communities whose reliance upon oral modes of communication is well documented. Like members of these orally-oriented cultures, out-of-school youth, even those from middle class homes, place great importance on oral speaking ability and tend to place confidence in information that comes through a personally known, oral channel, rather than through more remote and neutral literacy channels. Reading and writing are associated with the schooling they have chosen not to pursue.

By the time they drop out of school many such youth have effectively disengaged themselves from the literacy culture. They perceive that literacy plays only a marginal role in their lives.

Studies of street youth have consistently demonstrated that verbal language skills are highly important to social success. Black youth, for example, hold in high respect peers who can excel in performance of ritual rhyming and verbal gaming (see, e.g., Labov 1972).

Street youth observed in this study also valued verbal arts. Many youth panhandle in the downtown areas to scrape together enough money for food, cigarettes, and drugs. The ability to "scam" a passerby into giving money is a mark of street "smarts" and good talkers are actively observed by other youth. They spend much time regaling peers with their latest

panhandling success stories. Repetition of the story in amusing and graphic terms is as praiseworthy as the verbal scam itself.

Like verbal scamming and storytelling, poetry composition and recitation are respected and frequent activities. Many youth, boys as well as girls, compose blank verses that describe their lives and feelings. Some were very willing to recite them for researchers and took great pride in their verbal expression. The street culture has developed many words and expressions that are its "code" of identity -- marking the initiates and excluding outsiders.

Even youths' literacy practices have a strong oral orientation. Reading and writing are not separate, private, decontextualized activities, but a part of the highly communal life that street youth lead. Many times youth were observed reading aloud to one another. They worked together to complete written forms and to read instructions. They also amused themselves by reading to one another from magazines and newspapers.

These practices follow from those that adolescents engage in while still in school. Among youth observed in an inner-city junior high school, reading and writing were practices that were directly tied to face-to-face interaction, rather than alternative channels for communication (Shuman 1983). Many of these youth came from homes in which parents were not fully literate in English, in which the most able member of the family functioned as reader, writer, and translator for the household. Their free-time literacy activities followed that model. They composed written materials that were to be read by or to a group. They assumed, in their writing, that the reader was familiar with the context of the communication, thus their writing very much resembled speech.

One of the central characteristics of adolescents' writings for themselves was that they used oral standards of communication and [they] were used in conjunction with spoken interactions. The expectation that written texts would be collaboratively written in exchanges dominated by oral communication, and that they would be collaboratively read or read aloud, sustained the contextualization of the written texts. . . . For the most part, writing was treated as undigested communication which was to be converted into face-to-face speech. Reading involved a complementary system of those who read and those who interpreted. The ability to read and write was not an important measure of social status, and the quality of people's writing was rarely measured or evaluated within the community. In contrast, speech was constantly evaluated. (Shuman 1983:78-79)

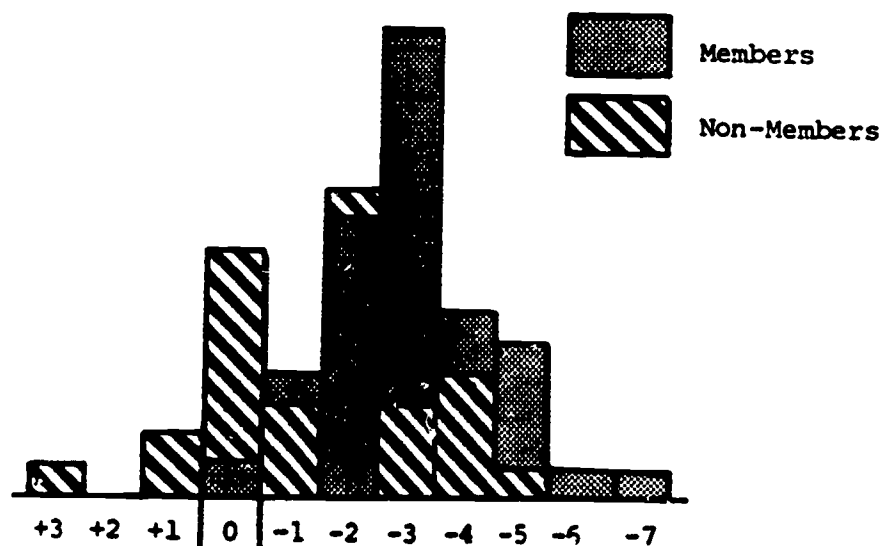
Ambivalent attitudes toward reading and writing. Survival on the streets requires that an individual become skilled in the ways of the subculture and this street wisdom is, at bottom, a more important education than any that could be received in school. An influential study of urban street gang life quoted one leader contrasting school smarts and street smarts:

When you on the streets you learn what's what. That's something they don't teach you in school. School don't teach you about life. And this is something they can't teach you. School put education in you head, but the streets tell you what you going to do when you grown. The streets teach you how to live. . . . Education, it does mean something, though. You might get a job before me . . . [but] you can't really make it unless you know what's happening in the streets. . . . maybe those people in school be more advanced than me, but . . . all them people with that education, they don't even know what's happening. (Keiser 1969:76-78)

Indeed, success on the streets may correlate inversely with educational achievement. An insightful study of Harlem youth gangs (Labov and Robins 1969) found that the more stature a boy had on the streets, the lower his reading achievement level. Figure Nine shows the distribution of reading skill levels among street gang members and non-members. Among non-members, there are a good many who are behind grade (two years behind grade was the average in New York City schools at the time of the study), but a substantial proportion who are at-grade in reading and some who are above. No gang members are reading above grade. The few who are at-grade are classified by the study as marginal members of their gangs. All central and leading members of youth gangs are reading well below-grade. Further, gang members' below-grade status increases with age.

FIGURE NINE

Reading Achievement of Non-Members and Members of Street Gangs, in Years Behind or Ahead of Grade Level



Source: Labov and Robins 1969:157

Thus older boys who are leaders in gangs, i.e., the youth with highest status in the street culture and the role models for younger boys, are the lowest reading achievers. Yet, these semi-illiterates exhibit strong verbal ability and exercise decision-making, and their followers depend upon leaders' strategic planning and leadership skills for their very lives. The researchers found that:

. . . the major problem responsible for reading failure is cultural conflict. The school environment and school values are plainly not influencing the boys firmly grounded in street culture. (Labov and Robins 1969:56)

While few youth interviewed for the present study were active in violent gangs, they echoed the sentiments of the youth gang member quoted above. Education is important, they say, but they have all they need. The streets they inhabit are violent and they, the young and inexperienced, are the most vulnerable. Only those who quickly acquire the skills of the street will be able to lead autonomous lives. Those who are too weak will disappear -- many come into criminal or protective custody; some die violently or of diseases related to malnutrition, exposure and lack of care; some return home -- or will become the prey of adult "protectors" such as pimps, drug dealers, and professional criminals. This climate of violence creates the need for an appearance of invulnerability. Street youth are very reluctant to admit to inability to cope in their chosen world. Indeed, one of the agency staff at The Way In reported that youth who refused to visit the drop-in center accused those who took advantage of the free food and temporary shelter of being unable to "handle" the streets without adult support -- the ultimate "put down" for young people on their own.

These young people have rejected the "straight" world of home and school. Or, more accurately for many cases, the straight world has rejected them. Many of their parents have abused and abandoned them, but, for the youth, the streets are a choice they have made. Conventional education in general and literacy more specifically cannot be overtly valued by out-of-school youth who do not plan to return, for to admit the importance of education would be to acknowledge the validity of a world they are rejecting and which, in various ways, re-rejects them every day.

Because literacy has a social significance that ties reading and writing skills to achievement, success, and acceptability in the straight world, literacy is not socially neutral, but a socially highly loaded issue for street youth. Literacy represents a struggle they are waging between the values of their marginal lifestyle and the values of the culture they have left; their attitudes about literacy directly reflect this internal conflict. Street youth do not easily admit that their reading and writing skills are insufficient for their current lives; rather they tend to assert that they don't need any skills they don't have.

When asked what skills are important for young people in general, street youth spontaneously responded that reading and writing were critical skills. For example:

Reading, writing, arithmetic? It's all as plain as day. How can you get a job if you can't read? Pay the bills if you can't add? People should have the three basic Rs; that's all that they need.

Reading and writing is very important -- I don't think anyone could get anywhere in the world without reading and writing.

If you can't read and write it's like going to another country and trying to get by without knowing the language.

People need to know how to read and write to make it in this world.

But when asked what was important for them, many street kids asserted that they have all the skills they need for their present lives. Their perspectives echoed the gang leader quoted above: Education offers some rewards, but life on the streets is the real, meaningful world and requires its own education.

I've learned a hell of a lot more than what the average [high school] graduate knows, because one thing you can't learn there [in school] is what life's really like.

No, we don't really need to do much reading or writing. It doesn't come up much in this kind of life.

If a person wants to be here [on the streets] . . . they'd better learn how to take care of themselves. If this is what they really want to do, that's what they need to get by, not reading and writing.

They're [street kids] not dummies. If they weren't smart or capable of learning they wouldn't be able to survive down here. You learn something every day. Even if it's illegal. It's hell down here, period.

If you're still on the streets you don't need it [reading and writing]. You need legal advice, but that's about it.

Street youth both accept and reject literacy. Literacy, as the foundation of schooling, represents for them the straight, school-and-home world. They highly value learning and, indeed, judge each other in terms of level of "street education". For those who have decided they want to leave the streets literacy is a doorway out. For those who are committed to the street life, reading and writing are valued only insofar as they are skills that help them function in that milieu.

Youth agency staff also characterized their clients' ambivalence toward improving their literacy skills:

Literacy is important to them. They know it's important, not just in the abstract, but also practically, for their lives in the streets. It does fit in with their street survival skills. But still they would deny that it's significant. . . . They also use it as a coping mechanism. It's an expression, like the use of poetry to release emotional stuff.

Kids are very defensive about their lack of [literacy] skills. They will deny that they are unable to perform some task, rather than admit it and get help, because it's too threatening to their self-esteem to admit that shortcoming.

Kids have an awareness that they can't get ahead without literacy skills, but it [getting ahead] isn't overly real to them. They don't really believe they will get ahead, although they pay lip service to it.

When street youth do admit the need for further literacy skills, it is usually with reference to employment. Many street youth are actively seeking legitimate employment, but only a minority are successful in securing a job:

[A young man who described himself as "slow" in reading:]
Reading and math, that's why I dropped out of school. I would have stayed in school if I could have. You've got to have school or GED to get a job that pays good.

If you didn't have reading and writing you'd be a vegetable. You'd never get a job.

Communication is most important. Without it you ain't got nothing going into a job or just getting along with other people. As far as reading and English, it would have to come next. They're really important subjects. . . . A lot [of street kids] can't write worth shit. Their penmanship stinks. They need to improve on things like filling out applications.

For what I want -- getting a job is the main thing -- as long as you pass sixth or seventh grade you know how to get by. I mean like a job at [a hamburger fast food chain]. Unless you want some other job at a higher level. You need to know receipts and stuff like that. I could use help with that. . . . [But] I know just about everything I need to know.

The ambivalence that dropout youth feel toward literacy and the schools is also acted out by many of the GED participants whom we met and discussed with agency staff. There is a high rate of dropout from the GED

programs among youth with just a very few credits left before completing their certificate. Several clients of The Study Center had passed most of the exams when they dropped out of the program. They simply didn't know if they really wanted to have the credential. Its attainment represents the point at which they would re-enter the straight world -- seek regular employment, give up (and be given up by) their peers in the street culture, and admit to adoption of mainstream values. Several youth said they had done almost all of the GED and planned to finish "someday", but just weren't "ready" right now.

Literacy practices. While youth answer initial queries about literacy with the viewpoint that they don't need reading and writing for their lives, this response usually refers to reading and writing activities that they associate with school. Asked to reflect on the ways in which reading and writing occur in the course of their everyday activities they recognize a variety of literacy functions that are important in their lives. Youth mentioned literacy activities ranging from reading about infant childcare to rental applications, legal and medical assistance forms, printing on cereal boxes and other foodstuffs listing nutritional elements, fiction, magazines, pornography, and film, television, and concert descriptions. One 16-year-old dropout from eighth grade described how she used writing and reading for entertainment:

You must always be aware of what's going on around you. I read and write a lot. A lot of my friends read and write. We write notes to each other. Reading and writing in my life is half and half. I need everything.

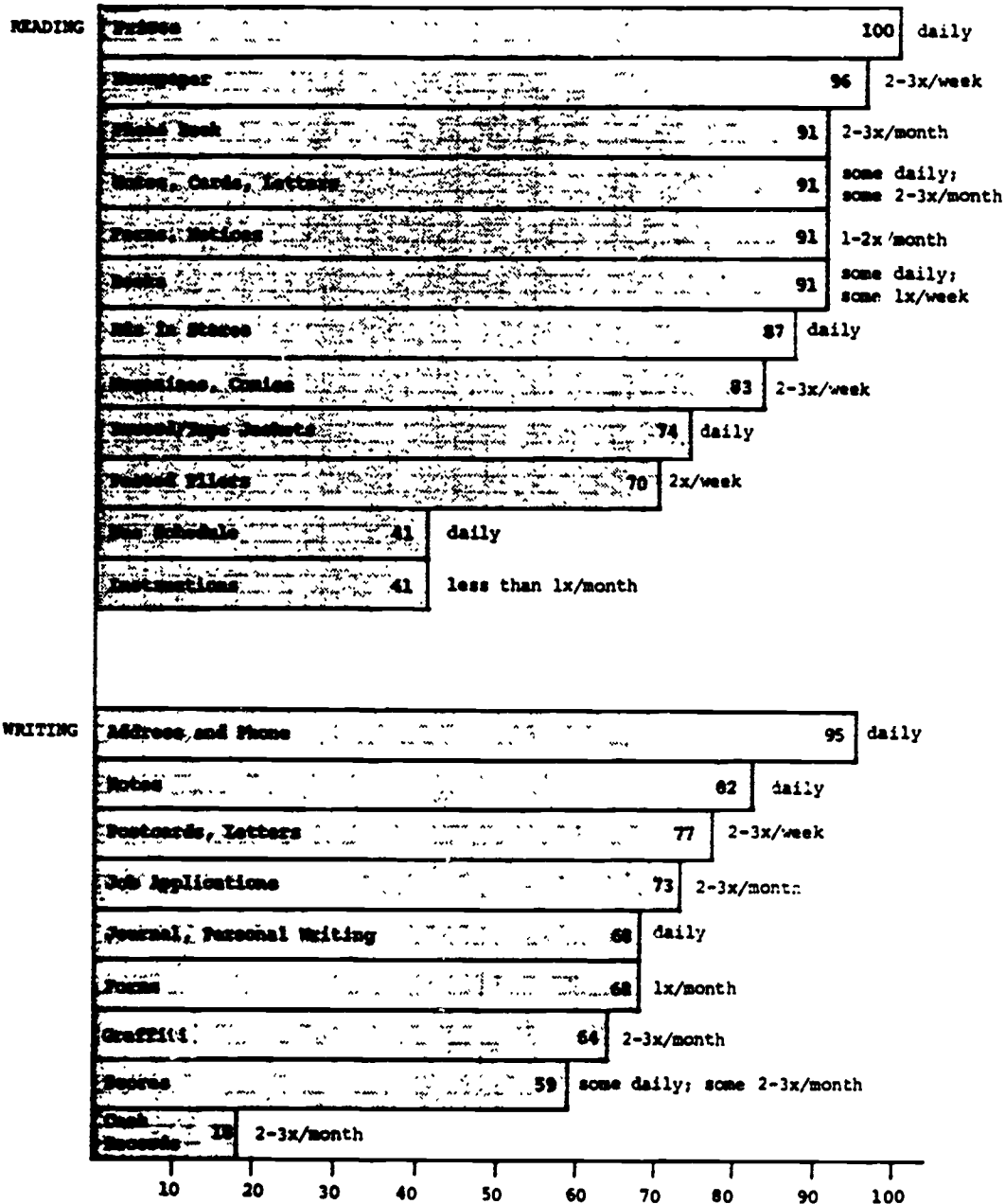
Figure Ten shows study interviewees' level of participation in common literacy practices. In addition to the proportion of youth who engage in the activities, the figure includes their estimate of the frequency with which they practice these reading and writing activities. For most activities the frequency responses clustered around a mean, given on the figure; for a few activities there was a clear bifurcation of regularity of the activity which is shown in the dual frequency reports for those items.

Street youth, like all young people, are as avid consumers as their means allow. They report that they read prices in fast food, grocery, and convenience stores on a daily basis. All but one of the youths (96%) report reading the newspaper; the group average is several times per week. And all but two (91%) have occasion to read the phone book, personal correspondence, forms or notices that come through their hands, and books at least once a month. Most (87%) also read advertisements in stores and store windows every day. The majority also commonly read magazines and comic books (83%), the jackets on records and tapes that describe music and performers (74%), and fliers posted on poles and walls that announce the location of shelters, concerts, and various activities (70%). Those, somewhat fewer than half, who ride the bus do not hesitate in their ability to scan the schedules and routes. And 41% also recalled occasionally reading instructions, such as directions for medication or for baby formula.

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FIGURE TEN

Percent Street Youths' Participation in Selected Literacy Activities, with Frequency of Practice



n = 22

Street youth read the daily city newspaper, national papers as available, a weekly arts and culture paper, and a variety of neighborhood newsheets. In fact, reading the newspaper is a common street activity. Homeless youth have no place to go and spend many hours "hanging out" on the streets. The newspaper is an important pastime. Youth can be seen in parks or the bus station scanning a paper that they have found (they cruise likely places where purchasers will have abandoned their morning news) or in clusters reading some amusing section to a small crowd of listeners. There was no part of the daily news that youth did not report reading. The most commonly mentioned was the comics, but many also noted regular perusal of the classified ads (they look for odd jobs), the front page, the living section (girls love advice columns), and the sports. Two noted special interest in the business section.

Some of the youth reported that correspondence-reading is a daily activity; most do so several times a week. This conforms with the high value that our informants place on the name, address, and phone number lists that almost all have in their possession. While they may have very few possessions beyond the clothes they are wearing, most have tattered, but carefully secured lists of contacts in the local city and in other cities where they have resided. Since the street population is highly transitory, last known addresses and phones are extremely valuable for tracing their acquaintances. Many also keep names of shelters, counsellors, relatives, or other helpful contacts in the adult world. Youth agencies maintain bulletin boards where clients can and many do leave messages for one another as they shift from residence to residence.

Book and magazine reading is a very common activity. Some youth reported reading books daily; others look at books once a week. Magazines and comic books were also a very popular and frequent pastime. A youth who had returned to living at home and one in a state group home reported that they had magazine subscriptions. Most picked up magazines in their wandering throughout the city, sometimes stealing them from display racks. Among the magazines the youth cited were, for girls, Seventeen, Miss Teen, Young Miss, Vogue, McCalls, Mademoiselle, and "ones that tell you how to make clothes and stuff", and, for boys, Space Technology, Aviation, Hot Rod, Road and Track. Both sexes mentioned People, Time, Life, Easy Rider, National Geographic, Sport Illustrated, and Playboy. One young man who daily studied the business section of the newspaper also read Business Week. Some had special interests such as Creem, Hit Parade, Heavy Metal or other entertainer-related periodicals. Another boy described himself as a comic book collector. Several youth mentioned that they regularly read "smut magazines". Two girls said they enjoyed crossword puzzle collections when they could get them. And one girl working to break an alcohol and drug dependency responded to the query with her regular reading -- the Alcoholics Anonymous magazine and her weekly church bulletin.

Book tastes were equally eclectic. Several girls mentioned specific romances they had recently read. Boys noted westerns as a favorite, three mentioning Louis Lamour as a writer they had recently read. Science fiction, fantasy, and mysteries were popular, as were a number of best sellers, including Pet Sematary, Restaurant at the End of the

Universe, and Clan of the Cave Bear. One girl said she read the Bible daily. A young boy confessed to a fondness for Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew mysteries. One young man, living on the street and attending a self-paced GED course at The Study Center, spent his time reading all the "mechanics" books he could lay hands on.

The forms and applications that street youth reported reading ranged from rental leases to legal papers that accompany arrest, informational materials provided by shelter counsellors, Medicaid and welfare forms, and Social Security information. One boy also noted that he carefully reads left-over credit card forms to see if he can use them with ID he has stolen.

Figure Ten, above, also shows responses to queries about writing practices. Writing names, addresses, and phone numbers is a daily activity for almost all the youth interviewed (95%). Correspondence also falls within the range of their regular activities: 82% wrote personal notes daily and 77% wrote letters or postcards for mailing, averaging several times a week. Three-fourths (73%) recalled filling in a job application in the last month, and some other form (e.g., for getting a public service, for the center in which they were interviewed, for legal purposes) in the recent past. Many youth (68%) engaged in personal writing, keeping a daily journal, notes, or other expressive work. Two-thirds (mostly boys) had written graffiti in the past month. Just over half reported that they had written figures for some kind of scoring, but few (18%) had kept any financial records.

Girls, particularly, are fond of reading and filling out all sorts of quizzes and self-assessments that appear in magazines. The service agencies kept a few tattered magazines on hand in which the questionnaires on beauty, dating and sex, personal relations, nutrition, and the like were always found to be filled in, often by several different hands. Reading a quiz aloud for group response was a common practice.

Indeed, writing is often a collaborative, group practice among out-of-school youth. Street youth continue to engage in the types of practices that are easily observed among junior high school students, especially girls. Shuman (1983, 1985) recorded, for example, diary-writing; graffiti; circulation of locally-developed pseudo-questionnaires about in-class romances; facsimiles of forms like marriage licenses and welfare applications, "kissing licenses" and a "constitution of love"; and a whole range of personal notes, letters, and lists of gossip facts. These writings were passed around and read collaboratively. They were often also written collaboratively, in a group or sequentially.

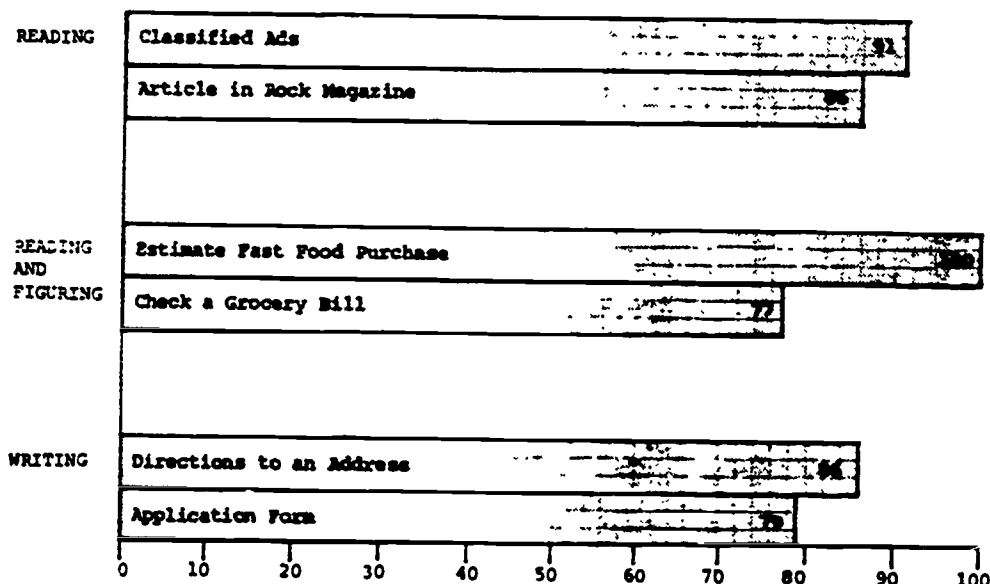
Very similar practices can be seen among adolescents and young adults who are out of school. Out-of-school youth are engaged in a wide variety of literacy activities. Some are for survival and information purposes, such as reading prices, advertisements, and instructions. Literacy activities also serve as forms of entertainment or pastimes for street youth -- reading (or looking through) books, magazines, and newspapers. The streets are a literacy-rich milieu and youth seek to function effectively in that environment.

Functional literacy skills. As the individuals quoted above serve to illustrate, most out-of-school youth argue that their reading and writing skills are sufficient to cope with daily literacy demands. And, at the same time, many admit that their skill levels limit their options, especially standing in the way of getting off the streets.

Figure Eleven shows our interviewees' self-report of their capability to easily handle selected literacy activities commonly arising in street life. Over three-fourths of the youth responded that they could handle all the activities easily. They felt they were equally strong in the three areas of reading, figuring, and writing. All interviewees stated that they could easily estimate from the posted menu what they could afford to buy in a fast food restaurant if they had a set dollar amount to spend. Yet a quarter of the sample (23%) could not go back and check a bill, such as a receipt for fast food or groceries, for correctness. Reading the classifieds also posed little problem to most (91%), and many engage in this activity regularly. Eighty-six percent said they could easily read an article in a periodical such as a rock magazine, approximately equal to the number who said they do read such magazines (see Figure Ten, above). Most (86%) could write out directions to a youth center or to the place they were living. This activity, too, is an important one in their daily lives. Over three-fourths (79%) report no problems filling out application forms that they occasionally run across.

FIGURE ELEVEN

Street Youths' Self-Reported Adequacy on Selected Functional Literacy Skills, in Percent



n = 22

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The strongly-felt need of out-of-school youth to appear competent in their street lives and to reaffirm the correctness of their decision to leave school may lead some to overstate their literacy competency. While these interviews, reflected in Table Eleven, were conducted with the youths' full cooperation and in an atmosphere in which they felt relatively comfortable, it is nevertheless difficult for them to admit to having difficulties that they cannot handle themselves, even when meeting with youth counsellors whom they know well and trust. Their responses to open-ended sections of the interview suggest that their assertions of literacy competence may be partly bravado. But, on the other hand, many youth can be observed carrying out fairly complicated reading and writing tasks. There is a great deal of variation in skill level that remains to be understood.

Youth agency staff made the following observations about their clients' literacy skills and practices:

Because they are moving around a lot, they need to communicate, to keep in touch. So they do a lot of writing to each other. They are literate enough to communicate ideas and feelings, though their grammar and punctuation may be rough.

Most of the kids coming through our program are "technically" literate, but they either have no experience doing things like filling out forms, or are intimidated by authority figures, have low self-esteem, and don't ask for help.

Not only is the truly illiterate population very small, some kids have amazing skills. . . . Kids who are functionally illiterate are that way because there is a need that hasn't been addressed that would have been if they were in a healthy home environment. For example, dislexia, vision problems, learning disability, a developmental need that has been overlooked.

Kids coming into our program either have adequate literacy skills or don't at all. Either they enter with the ability to pass a GED reading test, or they'd never make it. . . . I haven't seen kids come in with low level skills, develop them, and get the GED. . . . [I think this is because] there's no trained staff capable of dealing with, tutoring such kids.

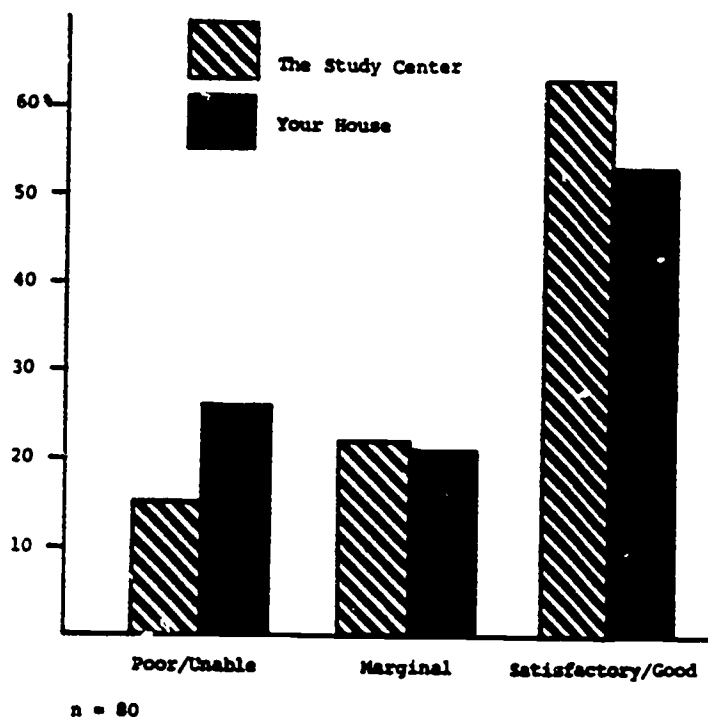
[In our program, kids'] literacy skills vary from very sharp to those who can't fill out the intake form. The average kid is working below grade level.

Several counsellors noted that the same youths who have great difficulty with assigned writing tasks such as the intake form and essay may be capable of expressing their emotions or personal problems in written form. For most of these the technical points of writing, e.g., spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, are very weak.

An analysis of youths' writing samples at the two field sites that maintain written records of clients confirms that, while out-of-school youth may function competently in some literacy activities, many have weak writing skills and cannot perform other activities adequately. Figure Twelve displays data for writing samples drawn from client files at Your House, the counselling center and shelter for youth in the process of leaving the streets, and The Study Center, the alternative, self-paced GED and job orientation agency. The Way In, organized specifically as a drop-in center offering anonymity to all comers, does not maintain any individual client files.

FIGURE TWELVE

Percent Distribution of Writing Ability of Clients at Two Youth-Serving Agencies



Analysis of clients' files reveals that approximately a quarter (22%) of the youth visiting Your House and The Study Center were unable to fill out the application and information forms themselves, or the counsellor had to provide so much assistance or rewriting that they must be considered to have been functionally illiterate for this task. Another quarter of the youth (22%) provided written responses that were marginally literate -- full of misuses of words, grammatical errors, misspellings, and incompletenesses that made them very difficult to

interpret. Such youth would not be able to complete a form such as an employment application in a minimally competent fashion. Over half the sample (56%) were able to complete the application and information forms in some acceptable manner. Samples were considered "satisfactory" if they were legible and syntactically and lexically comprehensible, even though they may have contained spelling, grammatical, and other minor errors. This analysis indicates that just half the youth entering these two social service agencies demonstrated writing skills at a level that would be regarded as sufficient for entry-level, unskilled jobs. One in four must be considered functional non-writers.

Note that, when the two agencies are contrasted, The Study Center has attracted fewer of the non-writers -- 15% of its clients, compared to 26% of Your House clients who were classed as "poor/unable". Both agencies have equal numbers of marginal writers, but 63% of The Study Center's clients can write satisfactorily, while just 53% of those at Your House have skills at the acceptable level. Thus, even though The Study Center is the most accessible of any educational program in the city, it creams more able dropouts, though to a far lesser extent than do conventional GED and pre-employment programs with their higher-skill entry criteria (see Chapter III, above).

Further, both the agencies sampled attract youth who are contemplating or have begun to move off the streets. We must assume that youth remaining on the streets, those out of contact with the straight world or touching it marginally and anonymously at centers such as The Way In, have even fewer skills and options than the segment of the out-of-school youth population whose abilities are assessed here. We must conclude that well over half of the out-of-school youth living in the street culture have seriously deficient writing skills.

Writing Samples

One of the youth-serving agencies in the site city posted notices of an essay-writing contest for the best works on street life and the viewpoint of street youth in places frequented by the street youth population. Prizes were very modest and some attempt was promised to informally reproduce the work for local distribution. The staff were surprised as a flood of entries from 35 youth appeared in just a few weeks. While those who chose to submit essays should by no means be considered representative of the writing skills of a typical out-of-school youth, their work illustrates both a range of ability among those who judge themselves sufficiently literate for such a task and considerable insight into the out-of-school, out-of-home world. A selection of entries is reproduced below.

Essay on Prostitution

I have been involved in prostitution for going on three years now. I was nearly 15 when I was "turned-out" which is a slang term for beginning to work on the streets. I began because I was on the run and I didn't have any place to stay, or any food to eat no money what so ever. . . . I always told myself, thats fine for them, but I'd never stoop so low. Well, when you're hungry and cold and need a shower and a change of clothes theres not too many alternatives. At least there wasn't for me. One thing I would really like to stress is that not everyone is forced into prostitution, not everyone is hooked on drugs either. As for myself, the first couple of years, I never messed with anything heavier than a little pot. Another thing I want to say is that not everyone has had experiences with Johns or pimps. I have never had anything bad happen to me, except for going to Jail. That was my greatest fear. . . . I have been busted maybe 3 more times since then. It took until last month before they finally figured out all my adult cases & juvenile cases and sent me to [] "school" (State reform school). I have been here for 5 weeks. I am realizing that Im a very intelligent person. I got my GED my second week here, and now I am in [C] Academy of Beauty here on campus. I never really loved what I was doing, but I was surviving the best I knew how at the time. At times I would have fun, not on the dates, but just being around other girls, gossiping and all the things that girls from all walks of life do. A lot of people would be amazed at how much heart some of the working girls have. I am not trying to glamorize prostitution at all, just expressing how I feel and how I have seen it. I have an 18 month commitment but I hope to be out of here by my 18th birthday, in August. I don't plan on going back to prostitution, but at least I know whatever happens to me I'll never starve.

Age 17

Adults and the world they've created.

Sometimes I wonder what things will be created by my generation. I mean, thirty years ago there were 200 kinds of drugs, today there are over 400,000. If the last generation produced that, with my generation being so much more educated about drugs, what will it be like 30 years from now?

I spent last year on my own, independent and on the run. I did things some adults will never do. It was fine when kids on TV did it, they had a great time, lived the glamorous life and always, always ended up at home with Mom and Dad. I had to find out the hard way that TV was a fantasy land, made for money. . . .

I remember last year. It's hard to be happy when everywhere you go there are images of dead children on the sidewalk. I know about nuclear war, oh God do I know. I've gone through my adolescence hearing about it. I'm 16 years old, I should be worrying about what I'm going to wear tomorrow or what my grades are going to be. Instead I worry about whether I'll die before I've had a chance to live.

Age 16

PROSTITUTION

Prostitution is just another life that some people approved and some don't. It is scary, yet strange. You always have to be aware of yourself all the time. You have to watch out for the freaks and the police and your money. Sometimes you get guys who are freaks that try to make you do things that you don't like to do, but if you have a knife or something to protect yourself you don't get hurt, but if you don't that is your problem because no one is going to help you. You have friends, but you are by yourself when you are doing business. It's real fun to spend the money after you make it because it makes you feel like you are independent. . . .

Like I said it is strange, but scary. For some people it is the only thing they know how to do. But I don't think that people should put down prostitution because if it was legal we would have fewer rapes because all of the freaks wouldn't be scared that they would get thrown in jail if they pay for a prostitute. It is a life that you have to live with if you are in the GAME!

Age 15

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High my name is [K____] - my street name but my real name is _____. This is the essay, maybe I'll win some cash maybe I can help in some way by sharing my thoughts. Either way is just fine. . . .

When I was 14 that's when it all really started, my parents were fighting more & more and my dad divorced my mom. My brother stole and did drugs Then I started drugs, and ran away Not hard drugs just alcohol and pot. You know, once in a while with my friend. I think it really affected me when they got the divorce. . . . Now little girls daddy gets stoned and is living with a lady not married, but I guess they are fine without her. There's more to it But things are the way it's going to be now. I mean you can't turn pottery back to clay. I am trying to deal with now & the near future. Like I'll have a relationship with my parent but live somewhere else. That's now it is now. I mean I really haven't been home forever. Actually since I was 12. I use to wonder where home is. . . .

Us street people have tried and we do, and we care. Some of the street children - or whatever they do get down. But I think we all care more than anyone else. We're survivors. Things have hurt us so we find something else. We are alike but in different ways. Maybe in same ways. These downtown people gather where they feel that they won't be pushed away, be put down. . . .

Age 15

Street Survival

I don't enjoy living on the streets but I can't seem to find any other choice at the moment. It's very difficult trying to survive on your own when you have no job, no way of supporting yourself. We have to rely on friends, relatives or other forms such as [The Way In]. For many of us [The Way In] is our only means of eating. It's not easy waiting until six o'clock to eat. We go through our day hungry, bored, and most of the time not very happy. I am very thankful for places like [The Way In] because without them there's no way we could make it. Living on the streets gets really depressing. We go day by day wondering where we're going to stay or how we're going to pay our rent at a crummy hotel. For a lot of people getting money means selling drugs, stealing, or prostitution. I don't do any of those so of course I never have any money. . . . My life was a lot better when I was going to school. I hated the classes but I still had fun. I was involved in drama, choir, and lots of school plays. I did things with friends on the weekends, and was basically happy. Living on the streets brings me down more than I ever imagined. When I first went downtown I had fun but after almost two years I hate it. I want a job and a place to live as far away from downtown as possible. . . . I would not advise anyone to runaway to downtown. If I had a choice I would be at home. Surviving on the streets is not easy and it isn't fun. I know it's made me miserable!

Age 20

Prostitution

Life as a prostitute is really scary. You risk your life everyday you are out on the streets. You could be shot, stabbed, raped, busted, or killed. Every girl has to watch over their shoulder for everything, and everybody. One of my experiences are I was out working and a pimp jumped out of his car and started to run after me with 2 of his friends. They were yelling things at me like: "I'm going to kill you Gritch" and "You stupid hoe."

I was a 16 year old prostitute, and today I honestly hate it. It is full of drugs, sex, and violence. Girls get beat up everyday, and put back out on the streets to get more money. Their pimps force them to deal drugs for them so they won't get caught. . . .

I want to tell you of my feelings about prostitution. They are strong feelings for what I have done wrong. One of my biggest is scared. Everyone gets scared day to day, but a death scared is different from all the rest. You are on the edge of life at times, but most girls don't show it. I always kept it in. But I have one objection to being a prostitute. You are treated like a piece of meat on the streets and just for sale for 1 hour.

Age 17

STREET SURVIVAL

STREET SURVIVAL IS TOUGH! I KNOW BECAUSE I'VE BEEN THERE. MY NAME IS S.T. MEET. . . I'VE BEEN ON THE STREETS SINCE I WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD. I RAN AWAY FROM A GROUP HOME IN [____]. I WAS ALWAYS HANGING AROUND DOWNTOWN TRYING TO GET MONEY FOR FOOD. I COULDN'T GET A JOB BECAUSE I WAS TOO YOUNG AND EVERYBODY KNEW THAT I WAS A STREET CHILD. I HAD TO STEAL FOR A LIVING. . . . THERE WAS A COUPLE OF TIMES WHEN I WOULDN'T HAVE TO SLEEP OUT IN THE RAIN OR UNDER A BRIDGE. THERE WERE SOME PROSTITUTES THAT SYMPATHIZED WITH ME AND LET ME STAY WITH THEM FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS. THERE WERE TIMES WHEN I FELT LIKE JUMPING OFF THE [____] BRIDGE INTO THE [____] RIVER. THAT'S HOW BAD IT IS. SOME TIMES I WOULDN'T GET ANY MONEY FOR DAYS ON END AND FELT LIKE DOING SOMETHING REALLY DRASTIC LIKE SELLING MYSELF OR ROBBING A BANK BUT I DIDN'T. I'D JUST GO STEAL A PURSE OR SUCKER A MALE HOMOSEXUAL. IT AIN'T EASY ON THE STREETS; YOU GOTTA BEG TO SURVIVE. AS A CERTAIN ROCK SONG GOES "I'VE BEEN KICKED, I'VE BEEN BEAT, I'VE BEEN TOSSED INTO THE STREET, BEGGING NICKELS, BEGGING DIMS, JUST TO GET MY BOTTLE OF WINE". . . . WHEN I RAN AWAY FROM ANOTHER GROUP HOME I STOLE \$12.00 FROM THIS ONE DUDE. I GAVE HALF OF IT TO TWO LESBIANS I WAS STAYING WITH AND THE OTHER HALF I USED TO BUY TWO ONE-WAY PLANE TICKETS TO [____]. FIRST THING I DID WHEN I GOT IN L.A. WAS BUY A GUN. I CAN HANDLE A GUN PRETTY WELL AND I DON'T HAVE NO QUALMS ABOUT SHOOTING SOMEBODY. I'VE BEEN SHOT AT AND I'VE SHOT AT. LET ME TELL YOU IT AIN'T NO FUN.

I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER BE ABLE TO LEAVE THE STREETS UNLESS THEY COME UP WITH A PROGRAM TO GIVE KIDS LIKE ME AND THOUSANDS OF OTHER KIDS LIKE ME A PLACE TO STAY. GROUP HOMES DON'T DO THE JOB RIGHT. I'VE HEARD STORIES ABOUT A PROGRAM CALLED [____] THAT GIVES JOBS AND FREE ROOM AND BOARD TO KIDS OVER SIXTEEN AND THAT AREN'T RUNAWAYS. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ONES UNDER SIXTEEN WHO AREN'T SIXTEEN AND THE RUNAWAYS. THEY NEED A PLACE TO STAY AND A JOB TO EARN SOME MONEY SO THEY CAN BUY CLOTHES AND OTHER NECESSITIES. MAYBE THERE ARE SOME ADULTS THAT CAN HEAR MY PLEA FOR HELP AND DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. ALSO, MAYBE THERE ARE SOME KIDS OUT THERE THAT WILL TAKE NEED TO THIS RECALL OF MY TIMES ON THE STREETS. THANK YOU FOR TAKING SOME TIME OUT TO READ THIS.

Age 16

Street Survival: What is life like on the Street

Survival, well it's not really called that, not with the streets anyway. It's really called a struggle. . . . Most kids go to the streets, because home is too much. But after they hit the street, home is their dream. "You can't go back." That's what everyone says. When you hear it from friends, people you don't even know, it becomes the only thing you understand. You see things that you wouldn't even read in a book or see on a horror film. People actually killing for drugs, booze, money, or sex. Or watching your best friend sell her body for your drug habit. Sleeping in doorways, and then being knocked cold for some junkie, so he could have your coat. Sometimes people will feel sorry for you, and give you money, or a friend you had, before you took your one and only trip for life, will lend you money or a place to stay. Your only trip. . . . Sometimes you forget the pain, or it goes cold, in the warmth of an old friend; but a street, can take the love from you, and leave you lonely. Days aren't so bad. Kids you went to school with are there. You act tough, look dead, and feel like you could cry. You don't have friends on the streets, you have a owner, and a loner. No way to look at it, either your up for grabs by cops, or by your dealer, or at your pimps convenience. . . .

Age not given

Streetwise.

If I was on the streets I would try to stay with a friend. If I couldn't stay I would go to the [____], And get a (job) room. Then I would go look for a job so that I could pay my rent.

I would let only one person stay and that's my brother. Because he help me pay my rent. And I go to [The Way In] to eat. If we didn't have a place like [The Way In] I probly wouldn't be able to eat so I glad I have a room and *[The Way In]*.

The End

Age not given

Sexual abuse:

I'm going to talk about a subject on which most people would rather not listen to, but someone has to because it is one of the most serious crimes that could be committed. It's on sexual abuse. There are many ways in sexual abusing a person. The most common is rape. Rape is having sexual intercourse with a female carried out without her consent, and is usually done by force. Another way is sadism. Which is an abnormal condition in which a person takes pleasure in hurting another person either sexually or abusively.

People who sexually abuse another has a psychogenic problem, which comes from problems that happened to the person in the past or present, which their anger or other feelings build up inside them. When they can't take it any longer they take it out on another person. Most of these problems can be cured by going to a psychologist or by attending a sex abuse program. Sex abuse programs can help you by getting your problems out of you and help you relate to them.

Most people don't realize how many sex offenders there are in the world. They could be your neighbor, a relative or a best friend. So if you know a person who is a sex offender or a victim, and is not getting help, please try to convince he/she into getting help.

Age 18

It is cold and rainy out. People are running through the streets most are your average middle class people, but then there are some people you will see they call them "street people".

These people are some of the coldest people in the world, not because they want to be but they have to be.

You have many different types of street people, these are just a few and a little bit about them.

Prostitute. Many people think this life is easy funloving, a quick way of making money, and a game.

But all of this is not all true. You are always at the risk that if you get into the wrong car it might be a killer, at any time you'll lose your life and most girls have pimps, and these girls go through more hell, their pimps will send them out in the cold sleet and rain threaten their life. Many of the girls who have pimps can tell stories of when they got shot or at least had a pistol pulled on them a time or two.

Pimp: Pimps have to get out every day trying to catch girls most of them never made it far enough in school to be able to get a decent job.

They know they have to press their girls to get them as much money as they can because in the game there is too much competition among pimps.

Dope dealers: They are the coldest people in the world.

They try to get you hooked so that you will spend all of your money with them.

They will sell you bad drugs so they can get their money.

Dope addicts: are the worst people they will kill you over \$20.00 so they can get some drugs.

This is what happens to people who can't control drugs.

Well these are just a few instances of street people's life with this little bit of information, I hope it gives you more knowledge of their lives.

Age not given

HITCHHIKING

Here I'm sitting
Yes
I'm getting closer by the day

I stand and wait
And sometimes hate
The passing cars too near
I'll always fear that they could shear
My arm
Or leg
Or head off

The cars they scream
The trucks they roar
Pushing red line to the floor

No, not taking
Just forsakeing
In their minds I am
I somewhere read
yes I oread
Of being in a limelight

Their lights are bright and moters loud
My mind I fear
That it's soon to explode

So
Here I'm sitting
Yes
I'm getting closer by the day

Born to Rock
Sworn to Roll
Cause Rock-n-roll is in my soul
There it'll be for all to see
That Rock-n-Roll is really me

Just One Drop

"Just one drop of poison
in this vast reservoir
wouldn't do anybody harm,"
he reasoned, holding out a vial to me.
"For \$50, would you throw it in?"
I laughed at him.
I didn't want to risk polluting
the water we all must drink from.
"How about \$500?"
Was this guy serious?
Even though a tiny bit
of the noxious fluid
couldn't really hurt,
it was sort of a
crazy thing to ask.
What would it take to persuade you?
\$5,000?
\$25,000?
\$100,000 a year plus paid vacations?
"Think of all the people you could help
with that kind of money."
Now he was starting to make more sense.
Could it, perhaps, be worth
a minor compromise,
a small infraction,
to be able to give aid to many?
Weren't there cases when
the end did justify the means?
Besides, it was just
one,
insignificant,
little
drop of poison -
easily diluted by so vast a reservoir.
But it was only after I
emptied the eyedropper
that I noticed
all the other people
walking away from the water's tanks
just like me,
with empty poison vials
and pockets full
of the wages
of sin.

Age not given

If I was older I would design a program for the needy people such as the hungry people and the handicapps or the people who runaway. I don't know what it is like being handicapped or being hungry. But I was a runaway. And when people runaway because they are scared and they need to talk to someone. I've lived with handicapps and it hurts them when they are disabled and can't do as much as the able kids. I would take them swimming take them to snows and teach them in the same thing. I'd also take them to different part's of the State. I'd let them earn money to send to Gaus, and the countries who are dying.

Age 15

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CHAPTER V

INTEGRATING LITERACY SKILLS TRAINING INTO OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SERVICES

The above descriptions of school leaving and school leavers, of youth life out of school, and of the practice of literacy among out-of-school youth are intended to serve as background for literacy program developers who would like to extend their organizations' outreach to the under-21-year-old population. As the preceding chapters have illustrated, outreach to out-of-school, out-of-work, and, in an alarming number of cases, out-of-home young people will require skill, flexibility, and patience.

This chapter brings together critical viewpoints, strategies, and recommendations for working with out-of-school youth. There are several perspectives on the problem of youth literacy programming which must simultaneously be kept in mind:

- o Few out-of-school youth have come forward to pursue high school completion or even non-degree programs in basic skills and pre-employment training. Existing programs attract -- and many are restricted to -- the most able among the out-of-school youth population, effectively eliminating the majority of early school leavers from educational opportunity, because they cannot demonstrate skills at sufficiently high levels.
- o Programming for out-of-school youth must meet their demand that education be of demonstrable value to them in their current lives or meet their aspirations for improving their lives, through gaining meaningful, legitimate work, and for meeting goals for stable, supportive interpersonal relations and personal growth.
- o Lack of availability of education is compounded by out-of-school youths' negative associations with schooling. Because many noncompleters leave school with a history of discord, if not failure, they are unlikely to return to education if it is provided through structures and in settings that recall their prior experiences or threaten to undermine any post-school hard-won and often tenuous self-esteem. Successful programs permit youth to set some of the terms of their educations, an autonomy demand that is crucial to the self-identity of these independent-living adolescents and young adults. At the same time, youth need to have clear, consistent rules to guide their learning, rules which can be substantiated as integral to the goal they have in mind, rather than arbitrary regulations.

- o Street youth trust few adults and are reluctant to admit the need for advice or assistance in any aspect of their lives, including basic skills. But, while most street youth decry the educational system and the adults they met there, and many are not or cannot be helped by their families, substantial numbers have come to rely on, confide in, and accept assistance from staff at youth-serving social agencies. It is the insights of these professionals upon which literacy programs can draw to make a connection to out-of-school youth and through which they can foster positive basic skills training experiences.
- o Youth on the streets do not lead lives that are amenable to the regulation and discipline of conventional schooling programs. They are often active or working at night and sleep well into the day; they change their place of residence frequently; their lives are unpredictable and unstable. Self-paced, part-time, and individualized programs (such as that at The Study Center described in this report) are more successful with this cohort, because they offer flexibility enabling youth to succeed in course completion, realizing success in small increments.

Each of these topics has been discussed in the pages above. This chapter puts forward strategies for integrating creative solutions to these constraints while undertaking literacy program development efforts.

Appropriate and Functional Literacy Training

The population. Early school leavers come from all sectors of society. Every ethnic group, socioeconomic background, and type of community in the United States is represented on the streets.

Some general characteristics of the out-of-school, out-of-work and out-of-home population to bear in mind in program development are:

Out-of-School Youth Characteristics

- o One fourth of all youth in America may drop out before completion of high school. Many return after brief absences. Many secure employment and may return, later, for job-related education. Others -- the target of these efforts -- will not return to conventional schooling.
- o The average age of street youth observed in our study appears to be about 15, but there are preteen children and young adults in their early twenties who are participants in the street youth culture. Many misrepresent their ages, pretending they are older than they are.
- o School leaving is highest between eleventh and twelfth grade and during the last year in school. A majority of dropouts

are behind-grade when they leave, having failed to pass along with their age-mates. Extended absence from school in an earlier grade (from, e.g., truancy, family moves or shift in custody) frequently leads to dropout later on, as students realize they cannot "catch up".

- o American Indians have the highest dropout rates, followed by Hispanics (especially from non-English-speaking homes), Blacks, Whites, and, least likely, Asians. White dropout rates are rising; those of other races appear to have stabilized somewhat. Minority youth may not appear in proportional numbers on the streets, or, if the agencies do not have minority staff, at the social service sites. Some minority youth remain less visible, in their own communities, in extended family networks.
- o Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are over-represented among dropouts. Many dropouts also come from families in which parents did not complete high school. They cannot be presumed to share middle-class or professional families' stress on education as an imperative for success. In contrast, street youth from middle class backgrounds may be explicitly rejecting their families' strong educational values.
- o Work is a very strong motivation for youth to leave school, but students have unrealistic expectations about their ability to find work. About half of them appear to secure employment; ethnic minority dropouts (like their counterpart graduates) are most likely to be unemployed. Some street youth have occasional or part-time legitimate employment. Some secure incomes through illegitimate means.
- o Boys' most frequent response to the question, "Why did you leave school?" is "I didn't like it." Many girls respond that they are pregnant or plan to marry; many also "didn't like" school.
- o Major studies of dropouts, due to their survey methodology, have focussed on youth who were at home or were traced through their homes. These reports miss street youth. Among street youth, family problems and running away are the most commonly cited reasons for leaving school. Failure in school may be just one indicator of serious psychological distress originating in some other part of the student's life and may constitute the precursor, evidence of the deeper problem, rather than the true cause of runaway. That is, for many youth, dropping out of school is a secondary effect of their decision to leave home.
- o Street youth may have a variety of personal problems that can affect their participation in training. They very commonly suffer from low self-esteem, leading them to fear an educational program as yet another opportunity to fail. Youth may have unresolved issues with authority, responsibility, and discipline. Many are substance abusers. There may also be serious emotional problems resulting from violent experiences in their families or on the streets.

Assessing the literacy skill base. While some out-of-school youth are sufficiently skilled (and interested) to create essays and poems of the quality of those reprinted in Chapter IV, above, others dropped out of or disengaged from school before acquiring literacy skills beyond basic decoding and reproduction. Those whose lives demonstrate remarkable skill in personal self-expression through literacy may lack test-taking skills or freeze up in a test-like situation. We met youth who had not attended school regularly after age nine, leaving school before their educations became predominantly literacy-based. Some youth have chosen to read and even to write actively since leaving school. Others were not engaged in literacy in any meaningful way even during their schooling years. Thus, the population of out-of-school youth has a wide range of literacy achievement. Curricula of programs designed for street youth must be broad enough to encompass near-beginners, marginal readers and writers, and semi-skilled readers and writers with specific functional deficits.

When considering the range of literacy skill achievement, consider:

Reading and Writing Skill Background

- o Statistics based on last testing in school indicate that 20 to 30% of out-of-school youth cannot read at the eighth grade level, compared with approximately 10% of the youth population as a whole.
- o Reading skill level cannot be accurately estimated from grade in school that was completed. The disengagement from learning may have come long before the act of dropping out, or, alternatively, youth may have continued to use and improve their literacy skills after leaving school.
- o Youth may have left school as early as grade four, i.e., before they have had much experience using reading and writing as learning tools.
- o Very few out-of-school youth lack all functional literacy skills. Even if they do not themselves read and write well, they are familiar with various functions for reading and writing and have developed strategies for achieving required literacy tasks, by themselves or with others.
- o Achievement in reading and in writing may not be symmetric.
- o Youth who left school and those who have not found employment are more likely to have low skills, but failure in school is not a reliable skill-level indicator.
- o Lower skilled youth may have already been rejected by pre-employment training or degree-completion programs for which they were tested and did not qualify.

Potential for literacy acquisition. Out-of-school youth have complex and differing reasons for having dropped out of school. No individual's verbal ability can be inferred either from summaries of dropouts' reading scores or even from that individual's in-school reading level test results. Nor is one's years in school a reliable indicator.

Although the question of dropouts' actual ability and intellectual potential is scarcely researched, findings to date indicate that:

Verbal Ability

- o Verbal ability among street youth varies widely.
- o A substantial portion of the youth out of school are highly intelligent. Researchers estimate that 11% could have achieved college degrees and that 19% of the out-of-school youth population would test as gifted.
- o Minimally, half to three-fourths of dropouts have the ability to complete high school.
- o At least 15%, and probably substantially more, out-of-school youth have specific learning disabilities, most of which have not been properly diagnosed by the schools. There is also evidence that youth have run away from school to escape "LD" classes into which they were erroneously placed due to poor performance that had its root in personal problems.
- o White male dropouts have tested intellectually at below average, but white female dropouts and black dropouts have tested at above average intelligence levels.
- o Regardless of ability -- realized or unrealized -- youth who are disengaged from the educational process and do not see their schooling as a route to success and upward mobility do not perform well. They tend to truancy, course failure, and dropout.
- o Some inferences about street youths' general ability may be drawn from their exhibitions of verbal language skill.

Social agency counsellors remarked often on their clients' reservoirs of skills, skills which enabled them to survive on the streets:

Creativity is one of their strengths. These kids are fighters If anyone's going to make it out there, these kids will.

I have to respect these kids for what they've been through Many kids have amazing skills They are surviving on the streets because they have great strength and resources.

Street kids can survive outside the system, but they don't have the ability to work within the system. They are very distrustful of the system; it's even hard for them to work within it even if appointments are made for them. . . . A program has to provide not just an opportunity to learn skills, but a safe environment in which they can learn.

Youths' literacy training interests. Youths in our field study expressed a variety of literacy training interests. They cited reading and writing skills that they need in their current street lives and also skills that they would like to acquire in order to transition from the streets to a more stable way of life.

The overwhelming reason that street youth would consider participating in literacy tutoring, if it were available to them, was to secure a job and get out of the street life. Although many street youth do have occasional employment, few expected to succeed in securing sufficient regular income to alter their basic circumstances unless they got into training programs. As one young prostitute put it:

[I want to learn] easier ways to get a job, how to live right, and not be a whore or something.

Youths' interests should serve as a starting point to organization of an appropriate curriculum:

Skills Desired by Street Youth

- o Job-related skills: auto mechanics, carpentry, welding, commercial cooking, computers, receipts and bills, reading the classified ads and their cryptic abbreviations, employment application forms, resume-writing, job-seeking, record-keeping for hourly employment.
- o Street survival skills: rental applications, legal rights, checking financial transactions, map reading, information for services like the 911 emergency number and Medicaid, reading instructions such as those on medications.
- o Personal development: Career awareness, "personal awareness", "how to live right", hygiene, nutrition, sewing, survival tactics (camping, "what to do if your car is wrecked"), poetry writing.
- o Skills for the adult world: tax forms, driver's license test, applications for public services such as medical care, infant childcare and prenatal care.

- o Preparation for further training: to qualify for a pre-employment training program, to prepare for GED work, to get special help with a known basic skill deficit or learning disability.

Drawing on youth literacy practices. There are a variety of materials suitable for literacy tutoring that are directly suggested by these perceived needs. Tutors might also wish to make use of literacy materials which some street youth already use, derived both from reading activities that further their survival and improvement goals and from literacy practices that they engage in for entertainment. Chapter IV, above, details street youth literacy practices, including specific books, magazines, and other reading matter that youth make use of. Refer to Chapter VI, below, for publishers, sources, and further specifics on teaching materials.

The following list suggests the range of materials that might be suited for out-of-school youth tutoring as well as activities that could be worked into such a curriculum:

Materials and Activities for Functional Literacy Tutoring

- o Forms, information sheets, and applications, e.g., employment applications, Medicaid and Social Security information and forms, materials relating to juvenile justice, information sheets that are used by youth agencies, AFDC applications for new mothers.
- o Books and magazines about youth culture, teen life, and adolescents' and young adults' interests, e.g., health and beauty, cars and mechanics, interpersonal relations, family issues, pregnancy and early childhood, spirituality, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, entertainment, and music. There are also social and political issues with which youth are deeply concerned, for example, nuclear war.
- o Journal-writing, letter-writing, creative and expressive writing. Good penmanship is, for many youth, an indicator of writing skill and the only aspect of peers' writing that youth are wont to comment on; penmanship practice might be built in. Youth may want to develop writing skills by corresponding with their families or friends.
- o Newspapers, especially the living or women's section (girls read it regularly), sports, entertainment, and the classified ads.
- o Drivers' training courses, for motorcycles as well as cars.

- o Computer skills classes, also pedagogies that use the computer as a learning tool. The computer is both highly attractive to youth (especially boys) and also a means to let them learn with greater independence and privacy.
- o Contests. Competitions such as essay contests (some of whose entries are reprinted in Chapter IV, above, are highly successful. A competition provides an opportunity for youth to achieve success publicly, a much-needed boost to their self-esteem. Assure that there are no "losers" -- these kids have already been branded as losers.
- o Youth newsletters. In the site city one of the local youth agencies is sponsoring a newsletter written by and for street youth and spearheaded by youth who have recently left the street life. It publishes news of interest to youth, interviews, and all forms of youth writing.
- o Stories and information about people with experiences like their own, e.g., teenage pregnancy and motherhood, family separation, family violence, youth living independent lives, substance abusers. For most of these subjects materials can be obtained from local agencies such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Planned Parenthood, Juvenile Justice. These are sensitive topics and their use with any individual should be pursued in consultation with the agency counsellor. Exercises used in counselling such as creation of a "life road" drawing/essay (see Figures Four-Six, Chapter II, above) are suggested as literacy training devices, if integrated with counselling work.
- o Writing that encourages youth to describe positive experiences in their own lives, to create positive fantasies for themselves. These can then dovetail with therapeutic work or direct the tutor toward activities that would serve the youth's long-range goals.
- o Pre-employment information, e.g., profiles of various kinds of jobs, job-training materials, descriptions of the local labor market and local employers.
- o Opportunities for assessment. Offer many opportunities to measure progress. Organize the training into small steps so that youth can see their progress and get supportive feedback.

In selecting any materials it is extremely important that they not have a juvenile or textbook-like appearance. Street youth think of themselves as adults, because they function as independent persons. School, for many, was "a bore" and textbooks and worksheets the most boring work of all.

Job literacy needs. Job-related literacy training is of paramount interest to out-of-school youth. In addition to making use of employment-oriented materials, literacy training programs may want to direct their tutoring with youth toward proficiency in on-the-job literacy skills.

One experienced job-literacy consultant suggests that the following research findings are relevant to literacy program planning (Mikulecky 1984), modified here for work with youth out of school:

Preparing Youth for Job Literacy

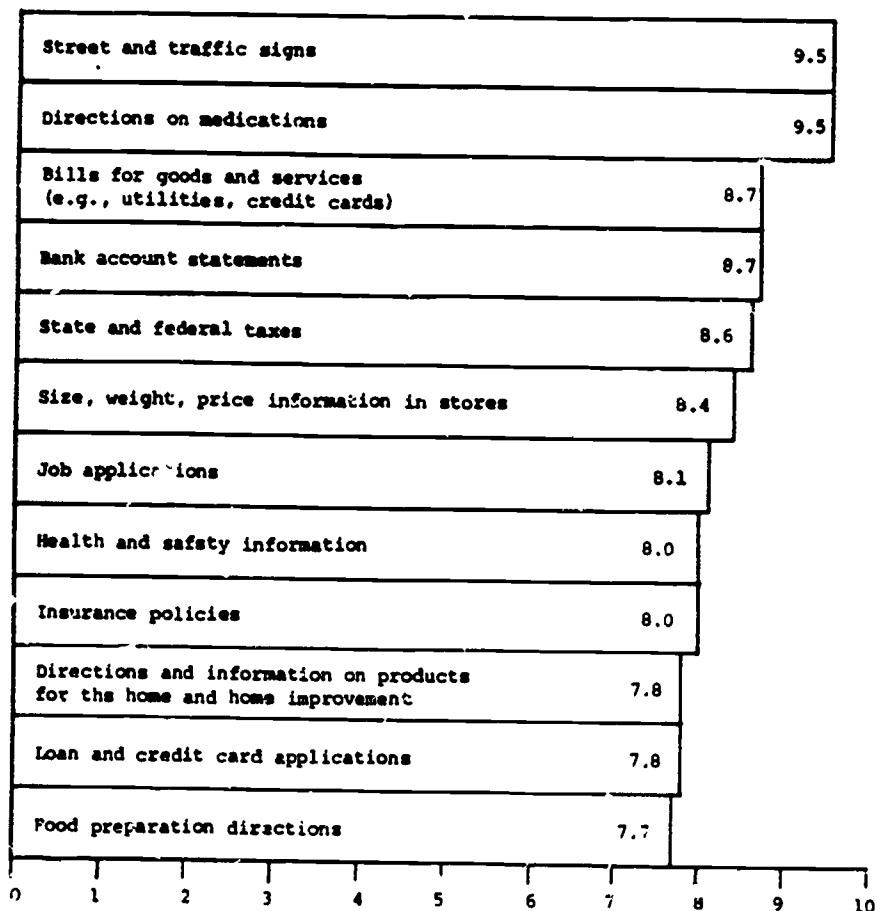
- o Most jobs call for literacy and computation.
- o Work uses a variety of materials while schools usually do not.
- o Literacy and computation on the job are often social phenomena, e.g., asking questions and gathering information from other workers.
- o Workers tend to read job material more proficiently than they do general material.
- o Teachers might undertake activities such as these:
 - o Practice using the telephone directory, e.g., to find business addresses.
 - o As an exercise and to accumulate teaching materials, have tutees write to solicit information on local employers and to request site visits.
 - o Undertake worksite visits, interview managers about their demands for job literacy.
 - o Have tutees keep their own records of training activities and progress; have them assist in filing and record maintenance in the tutoring setting.
 - o In groups or individually, have tutees develop summaries of materials received and site visits.
 - o Draw on the exercises in life planning that social service personnel use in working with youth; relate their descriptive essays to lists of job possibilities and try to get them to integrate their personal and employment aspirations into written forms.

Survival literacy needs. A study of the skills that urban-dwelling adults find most important for their daily survival (Negin and Krugler 1980) also is suggestive for out-of-school youth, both as they try to get by on the streets and as they attempt to find their way out into the "straight" world.

Mail and telephone responses from 250 adult Milwaukee residents rated the importance of different functional literacy skills on a 10-point scale. Of 20 common literacy practices offered in the questionnaire those listed in Figure Thirteen were ranked as most important by the respondents. These adults' responses bear parallels to out-of-school youths' stated training priorities.

FIGURE THIRTEEN

Urban Survival Literacy Skills,
Importance Rated on a 10-Point Scale



Source: Negin and Krugler 1980

An integrated approach to personal development. Several agency staff also suggested that literacy training will provide a valuable supplement or counterfoil to the therapeutic work they are doing with the youth. First, if training is held at the agency sites, it provides a safe, constructive avenue for the youth to begin reconnecting with "the establishment" -- embodied, for these young people, in the school. Second, it will serve to enhance their self-esteem, a key to their psychological healing. Technical skills and emotional growth must

be "mutually developed", these counsellors observed, in order that the youth be enabled to make productive use of the skills they acquire.

One of the potentially most productive ways to deliver basic skills training to out-of-school youth may be through an individualized program that is developed jointly with the youth and the agency counsellor. Exploration of family history or of alternative futures for the youth that are being conducted in the therapy could be the focus of writing projects in the literacy tutoring sessions. As a counsellor moves toward assisting a youth with seeking a job, returning home or to a supervised living situation, the literacy tutor can shift focus to training using job search materials, various applications for jobs or housing, and the like.

Creating a Positive Educational Experience

Program structure and setting. In order to reach out to youth, then, literacy programs must be readily accessible, non-stigmatizing, supportive, and of relevance to the youths' perceived needs. Social agencies serving youth present appropriate locations in which literacy tutoring programs might be developed. Youth are already at these locations. Professional youth workers can assist literacy tutors to approach and gain rapport with street youth. And, with youth workers' cooperation, curricula can be set up that will speak directly to the client population's immediate literacy needs and create an appropriate bridge toward the better lives they seek.

Location at a youth agency will bring literacy training into the fabric of street youths' lives. As one youth who himself suggested The Way In as a tutoring site stated:

This is a great spot. Everybody's already here. And it's close enough [to the street culture hang-out area] for someone to get there.

Presence in the youth agency would make it possible for youth who are interested, but not willing to immediately commit to a course of study, to "drop in" at sessions. They might bring specific literacy tasks they are seeking assistance with. These less structured introductions are important to convince many youth who are skeptical of the schools that they could be comfortable and could learn in these tutoring relationships. Development of a trust relationship is critical to learning, but especially so for youth who have experienced disappointment and failure many times over.

Just the activity of this research study, discussing basic skills with youth, brought a higher level of awareness of the importance of literacy to many of the young people we met. Presence of volunteer tutors will expand the range of services the host agencies can provide, bringing literacy into the umbrella of essential services that youth seek out.

David Harman, a leading scholar of adult literacy, has aptly characterized the advantages of integrating literacy outreach with allied services:

If literacy programs are to take root among those most in need of assistance, attention will have to be paid first to their overall environments and conditions of life. Social policy cannot be segmented; most people do not believe that increasing their reading abilities will help solve other issues as an independent variable. Literacy, then, can be introduced effectively as one component of a broader, more encompassing social action program that succeeds, among its other tasks, in inculcating a literacy consciousness into environments where it is currently lacking. (Harman 1985:9)

An outreach model using youth-serving agencies should succeed well in expanding "literacy consciousness". And that expansion will, in turn, facilitate better use of non-literacy services delivered in the same context.

Locating an agency partner. Cities, towns, and counties regularly publish directories of various kinds of services, public and private, that are available within their jurisdiction. The site city, for example, publishes a Youth Services Directory, updated every third year, and distributed through the Youth Services Division of the municipal human services department. It lists, alphabetically, service agencies for education, employment, families, health, justice, recreation, and emergencies. These range from the children's museum to the Girl Scouts and, obviously, many are not germane to the street youth population. However, centers such as the three study sites, a home for unmarried pregnant girls, court-related juvenile counselling centers, Girls' and Boys' Clubs, the YMCA and YWCA, alternative educational programs, privately-sponsored family assistance programs, group homes for runaways and family abuse victims, and crisis counselling centers can be found in its pages. Any of these centers may prove to be appropriate locations for literacy programs.

In evaluating potential agency settings, consider the following criteria. The youth-serving agency in which a literacy outreach program is established should, ideally:

Youth Agency Site Selection Criteria

- o Include in its client population a high proportion of youth under 21 years of age who have dropped out of school.
- o Not screen participants on the basis of educational qualifications or skills.
- o Not be devoted to delivery of education-related services, but rather be primarily a source for social or human services which, while not focussed on education or training, may have literacy components in which volunteers could cooperate or which they could expand.

- Have extended contact with its clients, so that they could participate in learning over time.
- Be committed as an agency to broadening their range of services and be experienced with or prepared to work with volunteers.
- Identify one or more agency staff who will coordinate literacy training efforts, cooperating with the literacy organization staff. This coordinator should participate in tutor training and be available to tutors when they need advice and direction.

Once an agency partner is selected, a more specific program can be designed for its client population. Some considerations for this stage of program development are:

Agency Characteristics Affecting Program Design

- Is the program walk-in, structured out-client, or residential? This will affect how service is delivered.
- Are the clients at the agency out of choice, from specific circumstance (e.g., pregnancy), or through requirement (e.g., incarceration)? This will affect their willingness to participate in programming.
- Who are the clients (e.g., sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, situation with respect to their families, long-time street kids or first-time runaways, delinquents)? Tutors should be matched with tutees appropriate to their own background and able to meet their interpersonal style.
- What is the average length of time that the agency is in contact with its clients? Consider the structure of your tutoring plan and its length.
- Are parents in contact with these youth? If youth are at home or returning to their homes, can families be involved in support of the literacy training efforts?
- Are there specific problems that have brought the youth to this agency (e.g., substance abuse, family violence, runaway, delinquency, truancy, prostitution)? Would literacy programming that focusses on these common themes and is tied to counselling programs be appropriate (e.g., at a center for unwed mothers, prenatal care and child raising, keeping a baby book, how to apply for AFDC)? Volunteer tutors should be trained to work with youth having these specific problems.

- o What are the facilities like physically? Where could tutoring take place? What literacy materials are accessible to youth at the agency; how could more be introduced?
- o Are there structured activities in which the clients engage (e.g., counselling)? Are there aspects of those activities that the literacy program could augment?
- o What records does the agency maintain that might offer insight into the clients' literacy skills levels and attitudes toward education? Youth react negatively to requests for information; you may have to work with little knowledge of their backgrounds, unless the agency can share it with you.
- o Does the agency already have (or wish to develop) a cadre of volunteers who might be interested in performing as tutors, as well as in other functions at the agency? Is there a natural pool of potential volunteers for this particular agency (e.g., is it religiously-affiliated, with a congregation whose members may be attracted to literacy tutoring work)?

In the site city, every youth-serving agency contacted expressed interest in cooperating in a literacy outreach program. Many staff had already noted that they were devoting time to clients' literacy-related needs. They hoped that agency-based literacy tutoring would have two positive effects: 1) that their staffs would not be drawn from the essential services for which the agency was developed and 2) that better literacy assistance could be offered than that which their staff, inexperienced in literacy work, can provide on the current ad hoc basis.

The tutor-youth relationship. The ideal tutor, agency staff agree, is a person who can tread the narrow, wavering line between friend and teacher. As one counsellor put it, "Kids don't care how much you know till they know how much you care."

Several staff suggested the big sister/big brother model for the tutor-youth relationship, a model widely used in youth-serving agencies. In such a framework the tutor would commit to a substantial length of time with one youth and enough time each week to develop a close, support-based relationship. The tutor can then provide training that is tailored to the interests and needs of this one youth and function as friend, advocate, and intermediary with the "establishment" world, for example, setting up and accompanying the youth to job interviews.

Regardless of the formal structure adopted youth workers advise that:

A literacy tutor with these kids has to always be a counsellor to an extent -- or maybe primarily -- as well. They can't be done separately. A kid can't learn from someone they can't trust, grow with. . . .

[A tutor should be] supportive and accepting of whatever the kid has to put out. Instead of challenging what they say or think. They [kids] need a sense of security. They come from crazy families, where they don't know if there's any security. A tutor can be an incredible mentor just by being supportive.

[It's] important to be authoritative, give them guidelines, structure -- kids need that. They want to feel safe. But you need to check back with the kid to see how they feel about how things are going, help them work with it, validate the feelings [they have] and then move on with the issue.

Drawing together the youth workers' comments and examples, the following list suggests attributes that would make a good youth literacy tutor:

Skills and Techniques for Tutors

- o A good listener. Able to be "real" to the youth, express genuine concern for them as persons, not restrict interest to the literacy question alone. But don't take the youths' pain on to yourself, for they must take care of themselves: "You can't take the pain away, but you can have compassion."
- o Ability to avoid the parental role. The relationship should include caring, but not be over-nurturing. These are independent-living persons, regardless of their age.
- o Consistency and clarity. Many youth have come from homes in which authority was arbitrary. They need to know what the rules are, why they exist, and that they are going to be held to them once they agree.
- o Patience.
- o Respect for "native intelligence", not just grades and test scores. Validation of the youth's previous experiences with education and understanding of the effect that severe emotional distress can have on demonstrations of ability.
- o Respect for the youth's privacy. Suspend your curiosity about their lives outside the tutoring situation. Confidence requires trust and youth will shy away quickly if they sense they are being probed or examined. Any request for specific information about their background, interests, or aspirations should be direct and clearly tied to some agreed-upon tutoring goal.
- o Confrontation skills. Exercised with caution, the ability to challenge a youth who comes in and is, as a counsellor put it, "just messing around". Youth need to learn to take themselves seriously; they will if you do. They will test limits, try to see how you act as an authority, in order to

feel safe in the situation -- this is a streetwise way to judge how they can act. Oft quoted by staff: "Respect them, but expect respect."

- o Flexibility and creativity in approaching teaching. Listening to what the tutee wants or will respond to, even when it is not well articulated. The kind of creativity that will tie the teaching to everyday situations, drawing analogies to the youths' own lives. Programs should be developed cooperatively with the tutee and altered if they are not meeting the youth's needs.
- o Ability to convey concepts in simple terms.
- o A strong sense of humor. Ability to enjoy the positive side of life, of youths' stories.
- o Non-judgemental attitude. Youth will search immediately for condemnation of themselves or their lives in the adults they meet. And, if they detect it, it only serves to validate their low self-esteem. You are here to support and train, not to rescue.
- o Good assessment skills. Ability to give positive, supportive feedback often.
- o Some insight into street life, so that you understand the range of backgrounds you will meet and so that the youth can't shock you with their stories. If the tutor is a streetwise person, he/she should be far enough from the street life to have some distance on it, a mature attitude about the difficulties of the transition.
- o Clear understanding of what you, the tutor, are seeking in this activity. Examination of your own needs that participation in a program with youth fulfills and how you can keep your own interests separate from those of the tutee.

It is critical that tutors understand the depths of the problems faced by their youthful tutees, but at the same time are able to recognize them as individuals and accept, respect, and learn from them. One counsellor summed up many staff members' feelings thusly:

Don't treat kids as victims. This doesn't help them move out of the role or empower them. You have to treat them as normal, ok kids. That helps them work through their victimization.

Training for youth literacy tutoring. Your youth agency partner is a primary and critical resource in developing a training program for volunteers who will work with youth. Tutor training will need to focus on both the range of skills and abilities that the target population will present and do's and don't's of working with out-of-school youth.

In addition to your standard tutor training program, consider adding components such as the following:

Training for Youth Literacy Tutoring

- o Have presentations by agency staff. They should alert volunteers to strategies for establishing and maintaining rapport with out-of-school youth. If there is already a training in place for agency volunteers, attend it or adapt it. Staff may wish to bring samples of activities and materials that are used in the agency.
- o Encourage tutor-trainees to visit the agency as volunteers, to assure themselves that they can work well with this population. This is also a good way to get to know the youth in a non-teaching capacity. Trainers should be familiar with the population in advance of the training.
- o Call on the services of local school district experts, e.g., teachers in alternative education programs, in dropout prevention programs, counsellors and truant officers, learning disability specialists.
- o Get information from other youth-serving professionals, e.g., in juvenile justice, in family services, in public health. The staff of your partner agency should be able to suggest colleagues whose perspectives would be most valuable.
- o Introduce tutors to the major psychological constructs used to understand victimization such as child abuse, the cycle of denial and self-blame that follows for the victim. Depending on the structure of your program, this may be necessary on a case-by-case basis, i.e., given the individual history of the tutees, or important for working with any youth in the agency's client base. Agency staff can provide this orientation.
- o Bring in youth themselves. These may be youth who frequent the agency and plan to participate in the program or youth who have succeeded in alternative educational programs.
- o Show the film Streetwise (see Chapter VI for information on ordering it).
- o Read some of the descriptions of youth life suggested in Chapter VI; assign some of the out-of-school youth essays in Chapter IV.
- o Don't shy away from the problems that youth have -- drugs, alcohol, prostitution, delinquency, emotional difficulties, alienation from family. Trainees need to understand what they are taking on and have information on what to expect.

Flexible programming structure. Several of our street youth interviewees held up The Study Center as an acceptable model for educational service delivery. They particularly cited its flexible pace and hours and the individualization of the teaching to their needs and abilities. These appear to be key elements in the success of programs providing educational as well as other services to street youth. A literacy tutoring component within a youth-serving agency would be ideally suited to provide such personally tailored reading and writing instruction.

Eighty percent of the youth we queried responded that they would be interested in literacy tutoring under such amenable circumstances. Their motivation, they said, would come from wanting to learn and recognizing that what they were learning was of immediate value or a step toward their goals of employment, security, and stability. They explicitly rejected the course/class model that they had experienced in school.

They don't need to make school like a jail. If people want to go, they can go. And let the other people walk out if they want. If they don't want to learn, they won't.

[In the Job Corps] the whole thing is set up for you. It's like a concentration camp. I want to learn, but I need to have some freedom.

I'm a very slow learner. I don't like to perform in front of others. At The Study Center, they are working with me on my spelling problem.

Street youth stated that they would commit from one to eight hours a day to literacy. About half preferred tutoring one-on-one and half thought that they would learn best and persist longer if they worked in a small group. Several suggested a combination of the two methods. "I like to share my thoughts", stated one girl.

The youth also divided their opinions on peer vs. adult tutors. Most thought that they would learn best from an older person, though for some the ideal person would be older, but under thirty. Those who favored a peer component as at least a part of the literacy training offered several reasons.

[I'd work best with] someone who would know what I'm going through and be tough on me.

I'd want a teacher who was on my grade level, but smarter, so we can both teach each other.

If a younger person gets on your case, you'll take it more seriously than some adult.

I'd like to tutor, like as a teacher's aide, a middle person.

Agency staff caution that, while peer tutoring can work well among out-of-school youth, it must be carefully approached and closely monitored. The tutor must not be so close to the street life that she/he

comes to identify with the tutee's life, trying to solve all the youth's problems or becoming emotionally overly involved. Many staff favor using adult tutors because it is so important for youth to come to re-trust adults and the tutor-tutee relationship can form just such a bridge. Some agencies have had great success with volunteers who are older adults, whom the youth relate to as grandparent figures.

Successful youth programming. There are few models for youth literacy training that are not reports of programs in institutional settings. Articles that do document success in teaching adolescents and young adults to read follow some of the lines that the youth themselves suggest. Alternative educational programs, for example, frequently make use of peer tutoring.

One such report describes how a 16-year-old finally achieved literacy after many in-school failures and recommends 1) peer teaching, 2) "using the strengths of nonreaders", i.e., their sociability and their knowledge of literacy functions, 3) materials developed from the youths' lives, 4) at all costs avoiding boring materials and methods, and 5) drawing on various reading learning systems, i.e., adopting an eclectic approach and tailoring it to the student's progress and interests (Epstein 1981).

Another successful approach brought a teen mother to reading through a program in which the girl introduced her young son to literacy. By "reading" picture books and later textual children's books to the boy, she not only oriented the child to the literacy environment, but developed her own reading skills and interests (Heath and Thomas 1984).

New York researchers, after investigating the full range of out-of-school youth literacy providers in the city, developed a list of recommendations for youth literacy programs which may serve as a guide to organizations considering the outreach strategies proposed here (Youth Literacy Task Force 1982:7-10):

New York Task Force Recommendations

- o Immersion: In order for students to experience momentum, 12-30 hours per week are necessary.
- o Goal setting: Goals must be ambitious, clear, testable, and involve the student in both goal setting and goal scheduling.
- o Curriculum: The most successful curricula are eclectic, experimental, and functional. They should offer alternatives as well as a careful sequence of competencies.
- o Recordkeeping: There must be institutional management of tests, activities, counselling, employment training, and attendance.
- o Grouping: Mix older and younger youth, but group by ability.

- o Class size: Develop groups of approximately 10 to 20, supplemented by tutoring and smaller group work. Peer interaction is important for morale.
- o Staffing: Effective teaching did not appear to depend upon formal training, but on a resourceful and experimental approach to the diversity of needs and tasks. Programs should have a minimum of four staff.

While these recommendations are directed toward institutionally-related education and toward programs that are more ambitious than the first efforts suggested here, they, together with the ideas of tutors and of the youth themselves, demonstrate a strong convergence of opinion favoring a flexible, student-cooperative approach to literacy training for out-of-school youth.

Assessing the work of social service agencies in New York who were providing youth literacy services, the Task Force argued that youth-serving agencies have many advantages as sites for literacy training delivery: They 1) pervade client life through their multi-service functions, 2) can entertain innovative and flexible curricula, since they are not regulated by the state education department, 3) have staff whose background is closer to the clients than that of schoolteachers, and 4) are not diploma-oriented and therefore can be eclectic and attack immediate functional literacy needs as well as prepare youth for further education.

Indeed, the New York Task Force concluded that:

. . . these [social service] programs provide excellent models for delivery of literacy services that, at the present time, are largely undeveloped. (p.10)

Here, then, in the youth-serving agencies of every city, is an under-utilized resource for reaching an audience whose reorientation to literacy will have rewards throughout their entire adult lives, benefitting the nation, as well as themselves.

CHAPTER VI

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH LITERACY PROGRAM DEVELOPERS

The resources listed here should assist literacy program planners and developers as they work toward instituting programs to assist out-of-school youth. Some of the materials listed below are well-known to the literacy community and are mentioned because they are among the few publications that give special attention to the adolescent and young adult low-level reader. Others are materials that may assist programs with their training of volunteers for youthful clients. This section is far from rich; unfortunately, the out-of-school youth population has as yet received too little attention. Thus we offer such suggestions as are presently available and hope that these listings are quickly outdated as literacy programs are extended to youth out of school.

Out-of-School Youth and Youth Services

1. Hard Knocks: Preparing Youth for Work, by Bonnie Snedeker.
The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982

Portraits of youth enrolled in Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) programs in three cities. The youths' responses to inquiries about their families, aspirations, reasons for dropping out of school are recorded and discussed. The CETA program, like its successor JTPA, enrolled dropouts in the highest skill categories; many of the street kids who are the focus of this report had either failed to qualify for CETA/JTPA programs or had failed to succeed in them for academic or behavioral reasons. The material here, however, provides insights into youth attitudes, especially the prospects for employment.

2. Streetwise, film directed by Martin Bell and produced by Joe Saleh.
Angelica Films, 645 Madison Av., New York, NY 10022
(Tel. 212-769-1400)

This feature film is a must-see for those intending to work with street kids. It documents the lives of a group of young, homeless boys and girls in Seattle's red light district. The viewer becomes involved in the young people's plight, comes to understand the

conditions that have driven them to choose the streets over their homes, and sees what roles traditional school skills do and do not have in their day-to-day existence. The film was developed out of a profile of these street kids written by Cheryl McCall and originally published in Life Magazine (July, 1983) Vol. 6, No. 7, pp. 34-42. At this writing the producers are at work creating an 16mm version of the film that will make it more accessible for educational users. Contact the producers for preview and rental information.

3. The Vicelords: Warriors of the Streets, by R. Lincoln Keiser. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1969

This description of the lives of members of a street gang remains of enduring interest. The author, an ethnographer, sketches their world, then allows these young black men to speak for themselves. A close-up, vivid picture of street youths' attitudes toward education and the straight world and the pleasures and pain of their existence emerges as they tell their stories. "Cupid's Story" touches on many educational issues.

4. "Who Drops Out of High School and Why? Findings from a National Study", by Ruth B. Eckstrom, Margaret E. Goertz, Judith M. Pollack, and Donald A. Rock. Teachers College Record, Vol. 87, No. 3, Spring 1986, pp. 356-373

An expanded analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics' study of early school leavers that was cited extensively in Chapter II, above. Valuable reading for those preparing training for tutors working with youth.

5. Young Girls: A Portrait of Adolescence, by Gisela Konopka. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1976

A report of interviews with 1,000 girls, aged 12 to 18, in which they talk about their life goals, friendship, loneliness, problems with drugs and alcohol, school, sexuality, out-of-school interests, and their ideas about the world at large. Much of the material is personal and immediate, including poems written by the young women. The book offers insight into the adolescent world.

6. Your local city, town, or county's directory of youth-related services

Request information from the human services division of your local government and, if a comprehensive directory is not available from a public source, check with the local United Way chapter. These directories catalog the various agencies that in some way serve youth and are your best guide for locating a suitable agency into which to integrate the youth literacy program.

7. Youth Policy

The Youth Policy Institute, 917 G St. N.W., Washington, DC 20001
(Tel. 202-347-3370)

A monthly newsletter for professionals working with youth about issues affecting youth and various youth service programs. Suitable as background, to get an idea of the range of youth concerns and activities.

8. Youth Practitioners Network

The Center for Public Service, Ford Hall, Rm. 133
Brandeis University, Waltham, MA 00254
(Tel. 800-343-4705)

A phone and mail information line for professionals and volunteers working with youth in the areas of education, community service, employment, and government. Provides referrals to youth workers in your local area, and information on programs nationally that may have interests in common with your own, as well as a wealth of printed materials. This document, for example, will be submitted to the YPN Network.

9. Youth: Transition to Adulthood, by the Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee.
University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974

An informative, balanced view of the inner and outer lives of youth in their teen years. The second chapter, "Background", could be a useful text for trainers or volunteers new to work with youth, covering the history of teenage life in this country, our cultural understanding of adolescence, economic issues affecting young adults, education for adolescents and young adults, and biological, psychological, and cultural contexts that shape youth life and attitudes.

10. Youthwork Bibliography

National Youthworker Education Project, Center for Youth Development and Research, 48 McNeal Hall, 1985 Buford, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108, published 1978

While lacking the most recent materials, this is a wide-ranging and well-organized, annotated bibliography for organizations and individuals who wish to work with youth. It covers various issues in the lives of youth, questions of how to approach young people, and program development materials. Relevant newsletters, journals, and films are listed.

11. Forthcoming: The Young Adult Literacy Assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)
Information available from Irwin Kirsch, NAEP Adult Literacy Project,
CN 6710, Princeton, NJ 08541
(Tel. 800-223-0267)

For the first time, this important, periodic survey of the state of learning in the United States will address the specific question of youth illiteracy. The report will focus on two youth populations: young adults 21 to 25 years of age and a smaller sample of dropout youth. It will report the results of investigation not only of youth literacy skill levels, but of youth literacy practices. Readers should bear in mind, however, that NAEP reaches its respondents through contact with family homes, therefore the street youth population will once more be excluded from study. Scheduled for publication in late spring 1986.

Profiles of Youth Literacy

Practices. Literacy program staff who are developing training for volunteers who will work with youth will wish to read some of the following descriptions of youth life and literacy practices. You might also consider one or two of these essays appropriate for inclusion in tutor orientation materials, for they are interesting, insightful, and informative, as well as accessible to read. These articles bring the functional literacy practices of out-of-school youth vividly to life and will help literacy tutors come to understand their tutees' attitudes toward schooling and literacy. If your local library does not have these books and periodicals, request them through the Interlibrary Loan program.

12. Achieving Literacy: Longitudinal Studies of Adolescents Learning to Read, by Margaret Meek, Stephen Armstrong, Vicky Austerfield, Judith Graham, and Elizabeth Plackett.
Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1983

This book is a narrative recreation of the authors' minute observations of their own and each other's work with adolescent non-readers in a London school. There are numerous excerpts from tutor-tutee interactions, examples of students' written work, and dialogs with the students as they come to read, elaborating on the importance of literacy in their lives. A fine complement to the views of out-of-school youth expressed in the preceding chapters of this document. Small portraits of the individual students are interesting, informative, and might lend themselves to inclusion in training.

13. "Adequate Schools and Inadequate Education: The Life History of a Sneaky Kid", by Harry F. Wolcott. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1983, pp. 3-32

This education professor found a young school dropout scraping out a subsistence living in the back acreage of his country home, gained his confidence, and recorded how the boy survived, why he left home and school, the nature of his literacy practices, and his hopes and aspirations.

14. "Collaborative Literacy in an Urban Multiethnic Neighborhood", by Amy Shuman. The International Journal of the Sociology of Language, No. 42, 1983, pp. 69-81

The essay is a description of two aspects of literacy practice among youth in New York City: first, how children in Puerto Rican families in New York City act as literacy helpers for their non-English-speaking parents and, second, the common practice among black and Puerto Rican youth of reading aloud in groups, so that information gained through literacy can be shared with non-reading friends.

15. "Essential Literacy Skills for Functioning in an Urban Community", by Gary Negin and Dee Krugler. Journal of Reading, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1980, pp. 109-15

In addition to the ranking of the most important functions for literacy in the lives of Milwaukee adults (see Figure Thirteen, Chapter V, above), the article contains lists of vocabulary words, graphic symbols, arithmetic symbols and words, abbreviations, writing skills, and computational skills that this survey uncovered as most basic for competent functioning in urban life.

16. Language Patterns in the Inner City, by William Labov. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1972

This anthology records the author's years of work studying oral and literate language behavior among black youth in Harlem. While some of the articles are technical, others are not. All are highly informative. Literacy program developers may be interested in "The Linguistic Consequences of Being a Lame", among others.

17. "A Note on the Relation of Reading Failure to Peer-Group Status in Urban Ghettos", by William Labov and Clarence Robins. The Florida Foreign Language (FL) Reporter, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1969, pp. 54-57 and 167

During their major study of the language skills and practices of black youth in New York City's Harlem district these researchers discovered that there was an inverse correlation between the reading ability and school success of young boys and their status in the street culture (see Figure Nine, Chapter IV, above).

18. "Playful Uses of Literacy Among Urban Adolescents", by Amy Shuman. Practicing Anthropology, Vol. 1 and 2, 1985, pp. 12-13

This article, also by the author of "Collaborative Literacy in an Urban Multiethnic Neighborhood", describes, with interesting and amusing examples, literacy practices like note-passing and creation of forms to record romantic relationships that are common among adolescent girls.

19. "Why Urban Adolescents Drop into and out of Public High School", by Michelle Fine.

Teachers College Record, Vol. 87, No. 3, Spring 1986, pp. 393-409

The author studied school records, observed in classrooms, and spoke with students and dropouts to try to learn why New York City black and Hispanic youth choose to stay in or drop out of school. Youths' responses to questions about school, life, and prospects for work are included in the essay. Many of the youth interviewed regard themselves as having been "pushed out" of school. Their afterschool life experiences reflect the difficulties of finding and keeping employment. Readable and useful for training planners and, perhaps, as reading for tutors.

Tutoring approaches. Like the articles just above, these are descriptive essays. They might serve as illustrations of some of the ways that out-of-school youth can be successfully approached by tutors.

20. "The Achievement of Preschool Literacy for Mother and Child", by Shirley Brice Heath, with Charlene Thomas. In Hillel Goelman, Antoinette A. Oberg, and Frank Smith, eds., Awakening to Literacy, pp. 51-72
Heinemann Educational Books, Exeter, NH, 1984

The second author is a young mother and school non-completer who worked with the first author, a literacy researcher, to orient her baby to books and reading. In the course of these efforts the mother, too, became involved in the reading development process, increasing both her skill and her interest in literacy.

21. "Illiteracy and Inner City Unemployment", by Michael Bernick. Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 67, No. 2, 1985, pp. 364-67

A description of an employment-related basic skills program established by the city of San Francisco, primarily to address the needs of unemployed youth. The success of the program has come through combining education with paying work and focussing the literacy classes on job-seeking and job-retaining skills.

22. "Lessons from the Rodman Experience with Dropouts", by Lloyd Besant. Today's Education, Vol. 58, 1969, pp. 52-54

A concise description of successful strategies employed in a Bedford, Massachusetts, alternative education program. The students in this program were all "hardcore" dropouts: They had failed in other alternative or remedial programs and/or had spent a lengthy time out of school and on the streets.

23. "The Road to Literacy: Teaching a 16 Year Old to Read", by Kitty Kelly Epstein. Journal of Reading, Vol. 24, No. 6, 1981, pp. 497-502

A sketch of the work of a peer tutor with a young woman who had fundamentally failed to read until given individual attention in a non-traditional school setting, using materials drawn from her own environment.

24. "A Twenty-One Year Old Begins to Read" by Pat Rigg and Liz Taylor. English Journal, Vol. 58, 1979, pp. 52-56

Although she had attended school or educational programs for 15 years, the young woman profiled here had not learned to read. The authors describe the individualized program that they developed that had her on the road to literacy in just 15 weeks of tutoring.

Literacy Tutoring Materials Appropriate for Agency-Based Youth Programs

Most literacy tutoring programs are planned to take place in a setting such as an educational institution, a home, or a library. And most are aimed at the non-reading adult population. There are a few resources, however, that may be of value to literacy organizations developing social service agency-based outreach programs for youth. This section also includes mention of some of the publishers who have materials which are suitable for work with youth; you may wish to request their catalogs and write for examination copies.

25. Fearon Pitman Publishers, Inc.
6 Davis Dr., Belmont, CA 94002
(Tel. 415-592-7810)

There are several series of high-interest books for adolescents written at grade level three. The "Bestsellers" series range from personal stories to science fiction and mysteries; teachers' guides are available. A series devoted to the space adventures of a young man and woman has audiotaped versions, so that new readers can practice reading along. Additional series of interest to youth feature westerns and the occult.

26. Functional Literacy for Adults, in 3 volumes: A Handbook for Administrators, A Trainer's Guide, and A Worktext for Tutors. Project F.I.S.T. (Functional In-Service Training)
Division of Community Education, Middlesex County College,
170 French St., New Brunswick, NJ 08901

The books outline a program designed for very low readers (below fourth grade level), aged 16 and above. A one-on-one tutoring program uses a variety of approaches, including language experience. Sample contents from the three volumes are available free on request.

27. High Interest/Low Reading Level Booklist
American Library Association, Young Adult Division, 50 E. Huron St.,
Chicago, IL 60611

A small pamphlet published annually by the ALA listing the most highly recommended new titles for teenaged, low level readers, grouped according to reading levels one to six. Single copies are 50 cents from the above address.

28. The High/Low Consensus, by Helen Elizabeth Williams.
The Bro-Dart Publishing Company, Williamsport, PA, 1980

An annotated listing of 1,100 titles suited for teens and young adults, categorized by reading and interest level.

29. High/Low Handbook, compiled and edited by Ellen B. Libretto.
R. R. Bowker, New York, 1981

The volume is appropriately subtitled "Books and Materials for the Teenage Problem Reader" and contains essays on how to identify, select, work with, and evaluate materials for teenagers who read at or below the fourth grade level. Also included are a suggested core collection of books for low-level adolescent readers and a list of bibliographies on the topic and sources of reviews of materials published for this population.

30. IRA
International Reading Association, Newark, DE 19711

The IRA publishes a variety of materials which can be of assistance to curriculum developers, including the Reading Aids Series which should prove especially helpful to programs and individuals who are working with non-traditional literacy tutoring materials. This series includes, for example, a well-written and -illustrated volume, Teaching Reading Skills through the Newspaper, and the equally appealing Using Sports and Physical Education to Strengthen Reading Skills. Such books can help tutors discover ways to take advantage of youths' interests and youths' existing literacy practices.

31. Janus Book Publishers

2501 Industrial Parkway W., Dept. AM, Hayward, CA 94545
(Tel. 800-227-2375)

A number of titles in this publisher's "Curriculum for Students with Special Needs" would be appropriate for youth out of school. Read On! Write On!, for example, is a series for very low level readers that includes two volumes of short plays that dramatize issues of deep concern to street youth and might be an appealing project for agency-based programming. When Baby Comes Home: Your First Year as a Parent is an attractive, sensitive book for expectant parents, a book many young mothers would love to have. A career education series describes interview strategies, ways to keep a job, and related problems.

32. Resources for Youth Newsletter

NCRY, 605 Commonwealth Av., Boston, MA 02215
(Tel. 617-353-3309)

This quarterly newsletter describes a wide variety of youth participation projects and may provide some interesting ideas for literacy learning activities that you might wish to borrow and sources for materials that your program can obtain instead of creating from scratch.

33. Scott, Foresman and Company

1900 East Lake Av., Glenview, IL 60025
(Tel. 800-323-5482)

Titles in the Lifelong Learning Division may be of interest to out-of-school youth. Getting and Keeping a Job and Your Body in Health and Sickness, for example, are informative and attractive and include vocabulary lists and pronunciation guides.

34. Steck-Vaughn Company

P.O. Box 2028, Austin, TX 78768

We placed several titles from the "Superstars" series in locations around our study sites and watched them disappear within minutes. The series profiles stars of rock, soul, country, and sports with review questions following each essay and a vocabulary list and questions with answer key in the back of the book. The publisher also produces a "Life-Coping Skills" series, including titles such as Forms and Messages, in which facsimiles of Medicaid forms, job applications, and other common writing tasks can be completed by the tutee, and How to Get a Job and Keep It, which walks the student through the entire process from job search to application, interview, and on-the-job relations.

35. VITAL Guidelines: Tutor Training for an Adult Literacy Program, by Audrey A. Armstrong and Sally P. Hunt.
VITAL (Volunteers in Tutoring Adult Learners), Monroe County Public Library, Bloomington, IN 47401

This volume outlines the VITAL language experience-based adult tutoring program and is intended to be used with the Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) Handbook and Indiana University's LIT-TV tutor-training films. It includes a valuable section on learning disabilities which would be helpful in assisting tutors to diagnose such difficulties among youth.

36. Voice of Youth Advocates
3936 W. Colonial Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23452
(Tel. 804-498-3639)

A bimonthly periodical offering brief reviews and review essays of reading material of interest to young adult readers. Books, films, and pamphlets are also included. Each item is evaluated for relative quality of writing, popularity with young adults, and reading difficulty level. Some of the reviews include comments from a panel of young adult peer reviewers.

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